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Major hopes attack on Labour will draw fire

By ARTHUR LEATHLEY
POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

JOHN MAJOR tried to put Conservative infighting over Europe behind him last night by turning his fire on the threat to the economy posed by Labour's European policies. The Prime Minister fought to shift attention from his party's internal troubles by delivering a scathing attack on Labour's threat to jobs, low taxation, prosperity and export success.

Seizing on this week's fall in unemployment and an independent report that forecast huge economic growth in Britain, Mr Major warned voters not to throw away the chance

of prosperity by electing a Labour Government next year.

He used a keynote speech on the economy to herald a new year campaign by ministers aimed at targeting the potential dangers of a Blair-led administration.

In a stark warning to those voters who considered it was "time for a change", he said that the general election result would determine the economic future of Britain.

"Next year, Britain will go to the polls. People will have their democratic opportunity to decide if they wish to do away with the Government that has enabled British people to build their success or choose

instead the policies of those who have opposed all the ingredients of Britain's success."

Tory strategists are building a campaign intended to expose Labour's twin weaknesses of the economy and Europe. The attack on Labour's economic background is timed to undermine the announcement, expected early next year, of Gordon Brown's tax plans.

Mr Major told the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce: "I know what some might say: 'Isn't it time for a change? Well, as long as you have progress, why bother to change? Britain's success is too valuable, too important to all of us to be put at

risk." He said Labour "could no more preserve the success of the British economy today than they could have helped to create it in the first place."

Mr Major said Labour had opposed every change — on privatisation, on union reforms, on public spending curbs and on taxation — that the Tories had proposed.

Mr Major pointed to this week's fall in unemployment, the largest for 25 years, "the glowing OECD report that put the British economy top of the class. You know that Britain's economic success isn't thanks to big benevolent governments telling you what to do."

Ministers believe that, having

reached broad agreement not to make a decision on the single currency before the election, the party should campaign more aggressively on Europe by underlining clear differences between the Conservatives and Labour.

Robin Cook, Labour's Foreign Secretary, accused Mr Major of being unable to unite his own party on Europe. He said: "John Major is a weak leader and the leader of a divided party."

"No-one will be impressed by his claims over Europe. The record shows he never gets his way, that he constantly fails Britain and fails Britain's interests."

Minister claims victory on fish quotas after all-night talks

FROM LEILA LINTON
IN BRUSSELS
AND MICHAEL HORNSBY

TONY BALDREY, the Fisheries Minister, claimed victory yesterday after striking a deal that will keep Britain's fish quotas next year at virtually the same level overall as in 1996.

The 21-hour talks in Brussels were so grueling that Emma Bonino, the European Fisheries Commissioner, collapsed and was unable to attend the closing press conference. "She is exhausted," her spokesman said. Mr Baldrey said all-night talks were "daft".

He said that he had achieved all Britain's objectives and that overall fish quotas would be just half a percentage point down on last year. He estimated that British fishermen would be £16 million better off in 1997 than they would have been had all the quota cuts proposed by Brussels been accepted. "Given where negotiations started, that is a considerable achievement."

Ulster Unionists, Northern Irish fishermen and Tory backbenchers indicated last night that Mr Baldrey's deal was acceptable. William Ross, the Unionists' fisheries spokesman, said: "It seems from first reports that Northern Ireland has come out of it as well as can be expected."

The deal appeared to have removed any immediate threat of the nine Ulster Unionist MPs in the Commons refusing to vote with the Government in the new year



and possibly forcing an early general election. The Unionists had fired a warning shot across the Government's bows by abstaining in the fisheries vote in the Commons on Monday.

Paul Leeman, chairman of the Northern Ireland Fish Producers' Organisation, said: "Mr Baldrey has done well. The result is not as bad as we expected. There is no doubt that the deal would have been much less satisfactory without the pressure exerted by the Ulster Unionists."

Although Northern Irish fishermen will have to accept a 25 per cent drop in the plaice catch in the Irish Sea, they will

benefit from a 28 per cent increase in the herring quota. Cod, whiting and prawn quotas in the Irish Sea will remain at about this year's level or slightly above.

Mr Baldrey, who had denied at the start of the negotiations that he was under pressure from the Ulster Unionists to secure special concessions for Ulster fishermen, said he had done "no more and no less" for them than for any other fishermen.

Barrie Deas, chief executive of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, said: "Mr Baldrey has secured some important improvements and mitigated some

damaging cuts but there is still a lot of pain." A cut of 22 per cent in the North Sea sole quota was "savage", he said.

Mr Baldrey said the reduction in the North Sea sole catch was necessary to prevent stocks collapsing and damaging the fishing industry in the long term. He pointed out that the European Commission, on scientific advice, had asked for a reduction of 48 per cent.

The whiting quota will go up by 11 per cent in the North Sea and by 30 per cent west of Scotland, and the haddock quota in waters west of Ireland, the South West, the English Channel and the Irish Sea will double, albeit from a

low base. Filippo di Robilant, spokesman for Emma Bonino, said the Commission could live with the fish catches agreed yesterday.

"It is satisfactory. This year has been a good year for fish," he said. "This does not mean that we can go and plunder because next year could be difficult."

European Union ministers also agreed to set up a satellite monitoring system by June 1998 to combat the problem of illegal fishing. All boats that are more than 24 metres in length will have to install tracking equipment, for which member states will get 100 per cent funding from the EU.

Fraud office investigates Tracie Andrews' solicitors

By LIN JENKINS

THE legal firm representing Tracie Andrews is currently under investigation by the Serious Fraud Office following allegations of systematic long-term abuse of the legal aid system.

Robinsons, the leading firm in the West Country, and one of the largest in Britain, has long courted controversy by breaking the time-honoured conventions of the legal establishment. Police raided the firm's offices in Bristol, Cheltenham, Gloucester and Swindon last year and also the home of some of the partners, including Tim Robinson.

Tim Robinson, who represented Miss Andrews at yesterday's hearing, claimed at the time that the raids were a "fishing expedition" possibly prompted by a complaint from a former employee.

The Serious Fraud Office said yesterday: "There is an ongoing investigation into alleged fraud on the Legal Aid Board." She was unable to say when the inquiry would be completed.

Mr Robinson, described by colleagues as flamboyant and a larger than life character, is considered an impressive courtroom advocate and his firm has expanded to capture a large amount of the legal aid work in the West Country.

In 1992, Robinson's took the unusual step of withdrawing from the Legal Aid Board's duty solicitor scheme when Mr Robinson criticised the administrative chaos and complained that some suspects were waiting in police cells for up to five hours before they saw a lawyer.

Instead the firm set up a flying squad of legal executives or clerks, driving company BMWs with the registration plates LAW, to provide round the clock legal help to people accused of serious crimes across England and Wales.

While effective in capturing much of the work provided by those taken into custody accused of serious crime they were not universally well received by other lawyers, the legal establishment or indeed, the police.

Nor had the firms earlier method of providing a service always proved popular. In 1989 Avon and Somerset police banned six of Mr Robinson's clerks from entering police stations to interview clients. Mr Robinson mounted a challenge in the High Court and succeeded in getting the ruling overturned.

The firm was also reported to the Solicitors' Complaints Bureau in the same year for entering a flat in the Cheltenham carnival which depicted a courtroom scene.

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Hartop disillusioned by lack of progress

Millennium chief resigns

Continued from page 1

extend the period by up to two years, a proposal that Labour has denounced as "madness".

Ministers claim that plans for the exhibition are in jeopardy because Labour has not backed proposals for the national lottery to take on any losses from the 2000 event.

At present, £200 million is to be taken from the lottery, £150 million from private companies and the remaining £50 million from other income including ticket sales. Labour figures are demanding clear contingency plans to

ensure that the lottery is not left with a huge commitment that will take money from other good causes.

Jack Cunningham, Shadow National Heritage Secretary, met Bob Ayling, chairman of Millennium Central, this week to thrash out details of the funding proposals. Although the meeting was described as "constructive", Dr Cunningham is understood to retain deep reservations over the viability of the project. He said that Mr Hartop's decision "can hardly improve the credibility of the

project" and he said that the appointment of "yet another minister is hardly the credibility either."

Mr Hartop was brought in to be chief executive of the Millennium Central by Mr Heseltine. He was seconded from the Welsh Development Agency, where he had been brought in as a troubleshooter. In his three months, he drew up a business plan for the exhibition which costed it at £704 million. Colleagues suggest that he sees no role for himself now that it is to be run as a public company.

Mother freed
stiletto attack
husband's lo



Maguire faces ankle retrial

Donna Maguire, the convicted IRA bomber, is facing a new trial over a broken ankle. Maguire, 30, was awarded £13,500 compensation after telling a judge that she injured her ankle when she tripped over a broken footpath near her home in Newry, Co Down. The Court of Appeal in Belfast yesterday ordered a retrial after being told no record could be found of a child Maguire had claimed to be visiting in hospital at the time.

Reynolds appeals on libel decision

The former Irish Prime Minister, Albert Reynolds, is to appeal against the London High Court finding that he had been libelled by The Sunday Times but eligible for only 1p in damages.

Mr Reynolds, 64, said the summing-up by Mr Justice French at the end of the six week trial was "unbalanced and grossly unfair". He said the jury's decision about damages was adversely affected by it.

Princess's friend in robbery ordeal

A close friend of Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon, is recovering in hospital after being beaten and robbed at his home in west London. Ben Holland-Martin, 41, sustained a broken nose, ribs and cheek bone, multiple stab wounds and severe multiple bruising.

Two men pulled a gun on the financier as he parked his BMW. They tied him up and threatened to kill him before driving off in the car.

Barbours storm over ripped

Council tied for £9,000 in benefits

Debbie Smith's nine-month jail sentence quashed in Court of Appeal

Mother freed after stiletto attack on husband's lover

BY RUSSELL JENKINS

A MOTHER jailed for attacking her husband's mistress with a stiletto-heeled shoe spoke of her joy yesterday after being freed in time to spend Christmas with her family. Debbie Smith, who collapsed immediately after her nine-month jail sentence was quashed in the Court of Appeal, later thanked everyone who had supported her "fight for justice".

She said: "I am obviously delighted at the court's decision. But I have been through a terrible ordeal and now just want to be reunited with my children."

Mrs Smith, 29, was jailed last week after being convicted of attacking her best friend, whom she had discovered in a bedroom with her husband.

She began sobbing heavily yesterday and her legs gave way as Lord Justice Beldam substituted a one-year probation order for the prison term.

Less than an hour later, Mrs Smith, of Dukinfield, Greater Manchester, looked more composed as she was hustled by minders from The Sun to a waiting Mercedes for a reunion with her children, Emma, 11, Jeff, 9, and Jonathan, 7.

John Parsons, her solicitor, said outside court: "We are

absolutely delighted at what has happened and that the appeal has been allowed. The family is glad to be reunited for Christmas."

Mrs Smith's release came four days after she was led away from Manchester Crown Court in handcuffs for unlawful wounding and affray, screaming for her children. She was held in the hospital wing of Risley remand centre, near Warrington, because doctors were concerned at her emotional state. The trial judge, Judge Peter Lakin, had described her behaviour as unnecessary and unreasonable. She had surprised her husband, Jeffrey, 31, and her former best friend, Francine French, 30, in the bedroom of her brother-in-law's home and, losing control, had lashed out with the broken stiletto heel of her shoe.

In his judgment yesterday Lord Justice Beldam described Mrs Smith as a hard-working and good mother. He said she had been grossly provoked by a husband who had been carrying on a secret affair with the next-door neighbour, Mrs French was not badly injured in the assault, but Mrs Smith suffered a fractured wrist, strained neck and bruises on

her body and face. Lord Justice Beldam criticised the trial judge for taking too restrictive a view of the offence and said he had been wrong to send her to prison.

He said that the judge could not have taken account of the damage such a sentence could do to a caring mother and "the effect it could have on the family already severely distressed by the departure of the father". He asked why, "in the circumstances", it had been necessary for Mrs Smith to have been brought before a court at all.

Earlier Nick Clarke, for Mrs Smith, said that his client has been totally traumatised by the jail sentence. Staff at Risley had been concerned for health and had taken turns to care for her and console her.

He said her agony had been heightened during her stay in hospital when she had learned that her estranged husband had taken her two boys away from school against the wishes of the headmaster. The children have since been reunited with their maternal grandmother.

The family is understood to have sold their story to The Sun for an undisclosed sum. Lawyers for the family said that any deal was a private matter.

Gladys Adshead, 59, Mrs Smith's mother, said afterwards: "It is the best Christmas present I could have wished. It is such a relief."

Mr Smith's family reacted with anger last night at the court's decision. Michael Smith, his brother, said that no one knew the whole truth of what happened in the marriage. He described Mrs Smith as unstable, vengeful, and destructive.

He said: "We have lost all faith in the justice system. She is the one who broke the law and she has made his life hell for years. All that Jeff has done is to build himself a new life after years of misery and torment stuck in an unhappy marriage."



Debbie Smith clutching a photograph of her three children, shown below, as she left court yesterday. She thanked those who supported her "fight for justice"



Jeffrey Smith and his mistress, Francine French

Councillor lied for £9,000 in benefits

BY A STAFF REPORTER

A LABOUR councillor who fraudulently claimed housing benefit from his own authority was discovered when he filled in a nomination form for a local election.

Christopher Wright was not registered for council tax at the address he gave and council officers investigated. Yesterday Wright, 49, of Broadstairs, Kent, was jailed for six months. He admitted seven charges of deception and asked for 39 similar offences to be considered.

His wife Brenda, 52, admitted three similar charges at a previous hearing and asked for 26 more to be considered. The couple claimed a total of £9,300.

Wright, a former publican and printer, twice stood unsuccessfully for Parliament. He was heavily defeated in the Thanet South seat in 1987 by Jonathan Aitken. After winning, the Tory MP said: "He was the Tories' secret weapon. He was loutish, boorish and rude."

A Labour councillor, Derrick Mortlock, said of Wright: "His activities give us great cause for regret. With the benefit of hindsight, it is unfortunate he was our parliamentary candidate."

The Wrights, who were living together but not married when the deception started, claimed they were brother and sister. They said they had no income other than income support, and no property except their home. But shortly before Wright embarked on his frauds, the couple bought a five-storey property at Margate, divided into flats. It was rented out and brought them at least £15,000 a year. During the investigation Wright claimed it belonged to a cousin.

Judge David Croft, QC, told Wright: "This was a persistent and carefully thought-out crime. You knew the system and you milked it for greed, not because you needed it." Brenda Wright was given 18 months' probation and 100 hours' community service.

Burberrys brews legal storm over designer's 'ripped off' coat check

BY GRACE BRADBERRY, STYLE EDITOR

BURBERRYS, the clothing company renowned for its raincoats, has taken legal action to prevent the British designer Paul Smith from using a beige and red check similar to the Burberry design in his menswear line.

Executives decided to act after they saw a Paul Smith coat featured in the September issue of the magazine FHM. They contacted Smith, claiming that the check, first used by the company in the 1920s, was a recognisable trade mark.

When Smith refused to withdraw the offending coat, Burberrys sought an injunction stopping Paul Smith Ltd from manufacturing and selling coats in what it claims is the Burberry check. The battle will be hard fought, as both companies enjoy considerable success in Japan, where traditional British designs are much sought after and where Smith is the biggest selling European designer.

Paul Smith Ltd has 184 stores worldwide, including eight in Britain, one in Paris, one in New York, and 162 in Japan, and a worldwide turnover of £142 million. Smith, 50, was unavailable for comment yesterday.

He is known for a distinctive British style, but one which is modern rather than Saville Row inspired. By contrast, Burberrys is the quintessential traditional English label, with two Royal Warrants. "The Burberry" even appears in the Oxford English Dictionary as a generic name for a good quality raincoat. Founded by Thomas Burberry in 1856, the company, which has 55 stores worldwide, started out as a manufacturer of weatherproof gabardine clothes. The first Burberry raincoat, known as the "slip-on", went on sale in the 1890s.

The check design originated in Edinburgh in 1924 and was first used as a lining along with many other patterns. It was not until the 1960s that the check emerged

as the most popular lining fabric.

In 1968, the check was introduced into Japan on umbrellas, and raincoats soon followed. The Americans also took to the check, used primarily as a lining. By the late 1980s it was seen as epitomising the city slicker style. Michael Douglas wore one in the film *Wall Street*.

Marcello Mastroianni, who died this week, was the trench coat's best advertisement — he wore one throughout the sixties and seventies. Other film stars to sport the check included Ingrid Bergman and Grace Kelly, as well as Jacques Tati in *Mon Oncle*. It cropped up again this year in the film *Mission: Impossible*.

in which it was worn by John Voight.

Over the years, men have evolved "right" and "wrong" ways to wear the Burberry raincoat. Buckling the belt is seen as wrong, tying it as "right". A turned-up collar has been fashionable off and on.

Despite all this, the raincoat — the men's retail at £425 — now accounts for only 10 per cent of Burberrys' sales. The check, however, is featured on over 300 products accounting for £500 million at wholesale. The best-selling item is a cashmere muffler.

"People have been ripping off the check for 25 years," Stanley Peacock, managing director, said. "But usually they've apologised and withdrawn the items."



Burberrys says the coat designed by Paul Smith, above, is too like their own check design, right

Lawyer's violence drove wife to run over child

BY A STAFF REPORTER

A SOLICITOR'S wife drove her car over a girl aged six while escaping from her husband, who had punched her after drinking heavily at a party.

Sonia Hall realised what she had done when she stopped the car to try to shake her husband off the bonnet, where he was hanging on by the windscreen wipers. She had been trying to drive across a field without her headlights on. The girl suffered a ruptured liver but has since recovered.

When Mrs Hall, of Bourne-mouth, appeared at Oxford Crown Court yesterday, the judge criticised her husband, Richard Hall, for his "disgraceful" behaviour. He said he was largely to blame for the accident during a Round Table weekend party at Oxford Rugby Football Club.

Mrs Hall admitted wilful neglect causing actual bodily harm. The prosecution dropped a charge of inflicting grievous bodily harm. She was given a conditional discharge for 12 months.

Mr Hall did not attend the hearing, where Judge Paul Clark told his wife: "This court sees all too much of the evil effects on others of matrimonial discord. On the balance of evidence your husband behaved disgracefully when drunk and it was totally improper conduct for a solicitor of the Supreme Court. 'You are well aware of the awful thing you did, but the blame largely attaches to your husband who, it appears, is a man of drink and violence.'"

Mrs Hall told police she could not remember getting into the car or driving it after she was punched, adding: "I didn't intend to hurt my husband or anyone else."

Stewart Patterson, for Mrs Hall, said the couple had a background of rows and violence. "Her husband was very drunk and this is confirmed by police. His behaviour to them was quite obnoxious."

The court was told that the girl's parents were considering a civil claim against Mr Hall, who was now likely to be divorced from his wife.



Computer likeness of the man seen in lane

Police show face of man wanted over vicious rape

BY LIN JENKINS

POLICE investigating the rape of a woman ignored by motorists as she struggled with her attacker yesterday issued a computerised image of a man they want to question.

Detectives in Kent issued the likeness of a man seen in Watts Lane, Chislehurst, where the 36-year-old senior civil servant was beaten in the face as she tried to fight him off, dragged through a thick gorse bush and raped.

Only one of 578 motorists stopped by police at the traffic bottleneck 24 hours after the attack said that they had driven the route the previous evening. The woman was attacked at about 7pm after walking from Chislehurst station.

Nobody said that they saw her struggling on the pavement with the rapist for up to five minutes as traffic queued at the mini-roundabout next to Chislehurst cricket ground. The woman said that she was so close to the passing traffic that she could distinguish the faces of drivers.

While disappointed with the results of the roadblock, detectives said they have had a good response from appeals to the public. The woman, who was told by her attacker that she would be stabbed to death if she tried to shout for help, was still being treated in hospital last night.

She has injuries to her face and inside her mouth. A metal object was pushed into her mouth and she was knocked to the ground and repeatedly kicked in the head and body.

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Student who killed her baby was seeing psychiatrist after taking overdose at university

Wealth and beauty hid a history of childhood traumas

By KATHRYN KNIGHT

EMMA GIFFORD, who was put on probation yesterday for three years after admitting infanticide, was wealthy, charming and beautiful attributes which appeared to guarantee a bright future.

Brought up on a family estate in the rolling countryside of Little Chart, near Ashford, Kent, she was 19 when her father, Michael, bought her a £250,000 flat in South Kensington, London.

Mr Gifford, 60, was for 12 years chief executive of the £3 billion Rank organisation until his retirement last year. His salary was about £400,000 a year, with share options worth an extra £428,000 in 1994.

As a teenager, Emma attended the £7,500-a-year St Edmunds School in Canterbury, Kent, where she appeared happy and was popular with the other girls. She spoke often of her ambition to become an actress. She was considered bright, charming, confident and gregarious.

After leaving school, her springboard into a happy adult life seemed assured when she secured a place at Edinburgh University to study English and Drama.

Soon after she started her first term in 1993, she fell in love with Joseph Ernst, a Portuguese architecture undergraduate, who also worked part time as a male model.

But despite this apparently privileged upbringing, Miss Gifford was already suffering deep-rooted problems. Her



Miss Gifford: abused by her alcoholic mother

childhood, it has emerged, was turbulent and traumatic, torn between an alcoholic and neglectful mother and an absent, workaholic father.

Mr Gifford's job frequently took him abroad on business and he stayed in London during the week. Emma's mother was alcoholic and was said in court to have "persistently abused" her daughter, who developed an obedient and pleasing personality.

Only six months after starting university, she took an overdose. With Mr Ernst's help she was encouraged to write to her father and seek help. She started to see a psychiatrist, but her problems had only just begun. In November, after abandoning university and moving to her London flat, she found out she was pregnant. She concealed the pregnancy and gave birth alone at the Chelsea and

Westminster Hospital. The baby was adopted, but the protracted process was said to have further contributed to Miss Gifford's deteriorating mental health.

In 1995, she discovered she was pregnant again. Mr Ernst told her he wanted to end the relationship. He moved to Portugal and she pretended she had had an abortion.

On April 5 last year she worked until about midnight at a florists shop. When returning home she began to experience contractions, lay down in the bathroom and at about 3am gave birth to a son.

The baby appeared to be coughing and not very well. She took him into the living room and tried unsuccessfully to breastfeed him, before both fell asleep. She agonised over her future until 5pm the next day when she was expected to go to work.

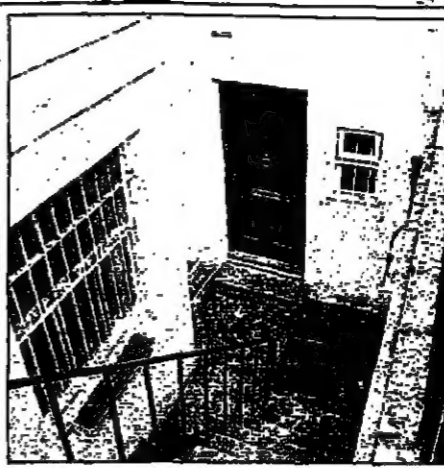
William Boyce, for the prosecution, told the Old Bailey: "She felt as though she had no option. She didn't know what to do. So she placed a flannel which she had used to clean the child over his face and put a pair of her boyfriend's pyjama bottoms over his head, and covered his head with a pillow for a couple of minutes and then went away and was physically sick."

Gifford then dressed and went to work. When she returned she removed the pillow. "She thought the infant was not alive but couldn't really bring herself to look at him," said Mr Boyce.

In a state of despair Gifford then rang her brother,



Top: Michael Gifford, a multimillionaire businessman; left, the family home; Miss Gifford's £250,000 flat



Kristopher, who came to collect her "and unknowingly the child because she had it with her" and drove her to the family home in Kent for the night. The next day she returned to the flat and placed the child's body in the freezer.

Doctors who interviewed her at the time said she appeared to have lost all touch with reality. Now 22, Miss Gifford continues to live in her flat and is receiving psychiatric treatment.

Family support groups reacted with overwhelming sympathy and said it was not unusual for young women to feel vulnerable and isolated when pregnant. A spokeswoman for the Family Planning Association said: "The case does emphasise the need

to make sure that young people know there are agencies designed to listen and provide support in this kind of situation. It is just tragic that this young woman didn't feel she could turn to them for help."

QC faces jail after 'liquid lunch'

By TIM JONES

A BARRISTER who failed to give a second breath specimen after the first had indicated he was nearly four and a half times over the drink-drive limit was warned yesterday that he could be imprisoned.

David Hands, QC, was stopped at 5pm by a plainclothes policewoman who had seen him drive down a one-way street near his home in Lambeth, south London, Horseferry Road Magistrates' Court was told.

When Rupert Mayo, for Hands, said his client had "had lunch" on the day of his arrest, Alex Ormerod, the magistrate said: "He hadn't just had lunch, he had an enormous amount of alcohol. It was a forbidding liquid lunch. The amount here was absolutely enormous. The court must therefore consider a custodial sentence."

Jacqueline Kerr, for the prosecution, said that a roadside test on Hands, 53, had been inconclusive and he had managed at Kennington police station to produce only one specimen when two were required.

Mr Mayo argued that the incriminating reading could not be used in evidence. But Mr Ormerod said: "The law says I can take into account any sample which is provided. You may say that he would have been better off if he hadn't provided a sample at all." Hands, he said, had admitted that the refusal was deliberate by pleading guilty to a charge of failing to provide a specimen.

Mr Mayo said his client's offence would be communicated to the Bar Council. "The conviction will have disastrous consequences," professional and otherwise.

One fifth of TV violence is on children's shows

By ALEXANDRA FREAN, MEDIA CORRESPONDENT

THE amount of violence in children's television programmes has risen by 3 per cent in the past year, despite repeated calls from the Government and regulators for it to be reduced.

Children's programmes accounted for 22 per cent of all violent acts on television in 1995-96, compared with 19 per cent in 1994-95, according to a survey carried out for all the main broadcasters and television watchdogs. When satellite cartoon channels are included, children's programmes account for 34 per cent of all television violence.

Lady Howe of Aberavon, chairwoman of the Broadcasting Standards Council, said she was particularly troubled about the increase in violence in children's programmes largely as a result of the trend to fill up the schedules with animation. "As we have pointed out, animation represents a real danger to the range and quality of children's programming, as well as through violent content," she said.

Lady Howe said that the survey, conducted by Professor Barrie Gunter of Sheffield University, raised the question of whether television was doing enough to promote positive role models. "Are there enough examples of negotiation to resolve disputes, as opposed to verbal and physical aggression?"

The survey, which monitored the content of programmes on ten television channels over 28 selected days, showed that nearly two thirds of all cartoons contained violence. One aspect likely to worry regulators and viewers is the apparent failure to show

that violence can have harmful effects. In half the incidents of violence monitored in children's programmes, no physical injury resulted.

A spokesman for the Independent Television Commission, which co-commissioned the report, said that more research was needed into the effects of animated programmes. "To a certain extent there seems to be a 'Tom and Jerry' factor — these programmes have been the staple of children's television for many years. But as the amount of cartoon material on television increases, we will have to look very carefully at it," he said.

The study also showed that the main source of violence on television was cinema films, which accounted for 54 per cent of all violent acts, compared with 53 per cent a year earlier.

Overall, however, violence accounted for only 1.39 per cent of total broadcast hours.



Tom and Jerry: unknown effect of animation

Gentleman turned bully loses fight to keep wife

By LIN JENKINS

AN AMERICAN teenager who fell for the English gentleman of her dreams was granted a divorce yesterday by a judge who conceded that her husband had become a dominating bully.

Dana Cannon was captivated by Simon Paul, a Londoner, and married him in Las Vegas in 1990. However, he became a "shiftless, dishonest" brute, her counsel said, forcing her to have their second child adopted against her will and making her sever ties with her family in the United States.

Mr Justice Wilson, in the High Court Family Division, granted Ms Cannon, 26, a divorce yesterday against the wishes of her husband. "Although I did not find him disagreeable, I was driven to say there was considerable force in the other particulars of counsel's description," the judge said.

Mr Paul, 30, also indulged in what the judge described as "dishonest and fraudulent activity" during the marriage. "Without hesitation I conclude that the husband has behaved in such a way the wife cannot reasonably be expected to live with him."

However, he said that Mr Paul had contested divorce proceedings, hoping to force her to return from America, where she had fled after being granted custody of their first-born daughter, Eden, now nearly three. He believed that, if he could make them return, he could prove to his wife that their marriage could be saved.

Earlier this year, the judge said he had ruled at the High Court that the child should be with her mother.

'Socialist' address thrown out

By JOHN SHAW

A BUSINESS consultant won a legal battle yesterday to stop a local authority naming his street after a dead Labour councillor.

Ray Knightly said he had been horrified when he discovered that the development of four and five bedroom houses was to be named Brian Barnard Close. He said the address in Bechtley Norfolk, (pop 1,200), sounded like an old people's home.

Mr Knightly and John Hilditch, developer of the cul-de-sac, wanted to retain the unofficial name of Elmham Court. Mr Hilditch's development company claimed the formal name was against the

wishes of residents and said that Mr Barnard, a railwayman and active socialist who died in 1988, was known for "extreme partisan views".

Robert Stevens, a solicitor for the company at a hearing at Swaffham Magistrates' Court, said the name conveyed the wrong image for "quality executive homes". He described it as "rather like buying what you thought was a Mercedes only to find out it was a Skoda".

Leslie Perrett, a member of the parish council which unanimously chose the name, said that Mr Barnard had been "a prime mover in establishing the village playing field, the village hall and he was very active in the

community". His political views were not relevant to village matters.

Michael Horn, for Breckland District Council, said: "It is pure snobbery to say it is unsuitable to a private development but is all right for council houses." A compromise will now be sought.

The London School of Economics was inadvertently omitted from yesterday's table of university research ratings. The LSE came third, with the number of staff assessed 366, the percentage entered 98, and the average rating 6.27.

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BUPA accused of discriminating against elderly

BY AUDREY MAGEE
IRELAND CORRESPONDENT

BUPA has clashed with Irish legislators over its health premiums amid accusations that it is discriminating against the elderly and forcing American-style health insurance on Ireland.

The British-owned health insurance company moved into the Irish market last month. It set up in opposition to the government-controlled Voluntary Health Insurance.

ance, previously the only Irish company offering private health insurance. But it has run into difficulty already. The Attorney-General, Dermot Gleeson, has raised questions about BUPA's premiums. According to RTE radio, Mr Gleeson is concerned that BUPA is discriminating against the elderly in favour of the young and healthy.

Under Irish legislation, private health insurers are banned from charging older people more for

their insurance. The 1994 Health Insurance Act says all insurers must abide by "community rating" and charge a healthy 25-year-old the same as a frail 85-year-old.

BUPA Ireland introduced a scheme in keeping with community rating. It is a cheaper equivalent of the basic VHI plan. Under the BUPA scheme, a young family of two adults and two children pays an annual premium of £455.74 before tax relief, £36.10 cheaper than the VHI equivalent. However,

only 9 per cent of the 1.4 million people currently insured by the VHI opt for the basic plan. Most choose more expensive insurance.

Under the BUPA scheme, more expensive insurance requires buying into the company's Cash Plan. This system charges older people substantially more than younger people. The BUPA Gold Plan, the most comprehensive scheme, costs £177.73 for a person aged under 18, rising to £705.60 for someone aged 55 and older. The VHI is accusing

BUPA of driving "a coach and four" through the community rating system. The non-profit-making company claims that the arrival of BUPA is the first step to American-style health insurance, which bases premiums on a person's age.

The VHI, now almost 40 years old, says its insurance scheme will collapse without the support of younger members.

A spokeswoman for BUPA Ireland said that its products were designed for the Irish market. She

said the company was confident that it would not be found in breach of any legislation. It had submitted its plans to the Department of Health for examination.

BUPA is facing tough opposition as the VHI is an arm of the Department of Health. The sole shareholder is the Health Ministry, which also appoints the board. In May, Brian O'Shea, the junior Health Minister, said that the Government would change the legislation if community rating was

threatened. "Community rating has served the Irish people too well over a long time to allow any interference with it to be tolerated," he said.

A BUPA spokesman in London said the company was waiting to see the outcome of deliberations by the Department of Health. "We have to take one step at a time. We have not yet been outlawed. We did understand that there would be questions raised. But we are surprised at the reaction."

All a little girl wanted from Santa in 1911

BY MICHAEL HORSNELL

A LETTER that Santa Claus never received has fluttered down the chimney of a country cottage 85 years after it was "posted" there by nine-year-old Mabel Higgs.

On December 8, 1911, she pushed her beautifully composed request on four pages of an exercise book up the flue in her bedroom. There it remained hidden among the gathering dust and falling sticks from jackdaws' nests.

singed by a hot cinder in one place but otherwise intact.

Apart from asking Santa to "remember the very poor children in the slums", she asked for a story book, a postcard album, a box of chocolates and a rattle for her new baby sister.

The letter came to light when Peter Hulbert cleaned out the chimney and cast-iron fireplace in what is now his five-year-old son Lee's room

during renovations at Bramble Cottage in Holt, Wiltshire. In cursive writing, Mabel wrote:

Dear Santa Claus
Last year you brought me many nice presents and I think you were very kind indeed. I expect you would like to know what I should like you to bring me this year. Well, I should like you to bring me a storybook, a postcard album, a box of chocolates and a sweetshop.

We have a little baby and we would like you to bring her a rattle that will blow.

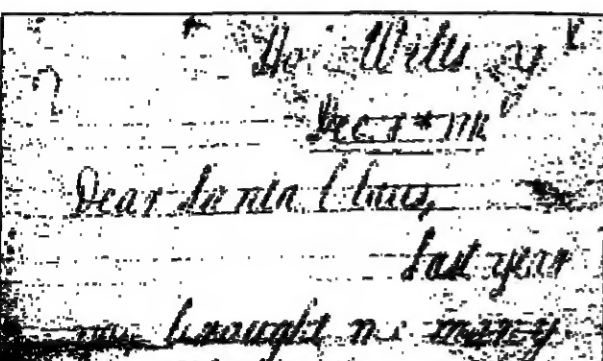
I hope you will remember the very poor children in the slums and in the large towns. I might stay awake for some time to see you come in our bedroom to put the things in my stocking the night you come. Our house is on the common.

With much love, I remain your little friend, Mabel.

Lee Hulbert, who wants Lego and Connect from Father Christmas, said: "I think Mabel's letter is good. It taught me more about Christmas and I wrote to Santa because of it. Christmas is good because Jesus was born then and I get a few of the chocolates on the Christmas tree."

Mabel Higgs was born in 1902 and died in 1979. Her father was an engine driver and her mother a housewife. Her only child, Wendy Hater, 54, said last night: "I was very touched to hear about this letter. My mother was a lovely person. This letter seems very in keeping with what she was like as an adult."

"It's funny to see how things change. Youngsters seem to want a lot more these days."



Mabel Higgs's letter, found 85 years after "posting"

Post Office elves keep children's hopes alive

POST OFFICE staff have replied to 750,000 children who wrote to Santa Claus this year at his grotto in Reindeer Land (Michael Horsnell writes).

Children have been sending him their Christmas lists, usually via the chimney or mantelpiece, since the early part of last century. But only since 1963 has the Post Office been helping with his correspondence.

Staff in Belfast deal with

the replies, warning children to be asleep when Santa calls. The last posting date for requests was December 11.

Yesterday a spokesman said that children were no more demanding now than in years past. In this month's posting was a letter from a girl whose bicycle had been stolen. She wanted it back — and a new one for the thief. Another girl sent her father's CV and asked Santa to give him a job.

Tamarin bounces back from the brink

BY NICK NUTTALL
ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT

CONSERVATIONISTS are winning the battle to save the golden lion tamarin. Eight hundred of the rare, squirrel-sized monkeys are now alive in the wild.

Twelve years ago, the golden lion tamarin was thought to be heading for extinction. But captive breeding programmes at centres such as London Zoo, together with reintroduction into the Atlantic forests of Brazil, have managed to turn the tide. Garo Batmalian, director of the World Wide Fund for Nature office in Brazil, said yesterday that the monkeys, which sport a reddish-gold coat, were the wildlife success story of 1996.

He added: "Now we have a new challenge, to double the size of the tamarin's habitat over the next 50 years in order to ensure the long-term viability of this species in the wild."

The international effort to save *Leontopithecus rosalia* follows the steady destruction of its forest habitat, which once covered a million square kilometres.

It is down to less than 2 per cent of its original size and what is left is highly fragmented: the tamarin's main reserve, Poco das Antas Biological, is only a few miles north of Rio de Janeiro. The area remains under threat of clearance for agriculture and housing.

The species, which eats fruit and insects, has been saved by an international



The golden lion tamarin was badly affected by the destruction of its forest habitat

collaboration headed by the National Zoo in Washington DC and centres in Brazil and Europe. Jo Gippis, director of London Zoo, said that they had been breeding tamarins in captivity as part of a conservation project for more than ten years.

Those reintroduced in Brazil are genetically screened by the Washington team from zoo stocks around the globe. A key to the success has been

their acclimatisation in Brazilian-type conditions in Washington. Dr Gippis said the captive bred tamarins were now being reintroduced into wild groups. "The best way to learn what a dangerous snake is, what is good to eat and what is not is from another, wild, golden lion tamarin."

Mr Batmalian said scientists put at 2,000 the number of wild golden lion tamarins

needed to sustain the species' survival into the 21st century.

Jose Luis Camargo, an ecologist at the main reserve, said yesterday: "We have isolated forest patches here and we are planning to build vegetation corridors so that the monkeys can move about and find suitable mates". The researchers plan to double the areas of protected forest by working in co-operation with local farmers.

Ladybird becomes contract killer

BY NICK NUTTALL

LADYBIRDS could soon be enlisted by farmers and gardeners in their fight against aphids. Scientists have discovered a way of using them to spread a fungus that is harmless to the ladybirds but deadly to the aphids.

Aphids such as greenfly and blackfly bring misery to rose cultivators and cost farmers millions of pounds each year. Researchers plan to coat large numbers of ladybirds with the fungal spores and dispatch them into fields and gardens at critical times of the year, such as spring.

Researchers are also isolating pheromones produced by ladybirds to attract mates. It is hoped to use them, perhaps as sprays, to attract spore-carrying ladybirds more efficiently to all parts of a field.

Helen Roy, one of the scientists behind the research, said that gardeners may soon be buying dead freeze-dried aphids laden with fungal spores and a tub of live ladybirds from their garden centres. "All you would do is moisten the aphid to release the spores and pop in the ladybirds, who then pick them up before releasing them into the garden," she said.

The discoveries have been made by scientists at Nottingham University and Rothamsted, the government-funded research station at Harpenden, Hertfordshire. Ms Roy, of Rothamsted, said that the fungus *Erwinia neoaphidis* stuck to the skin of aphids, using mucus, then burrowed into them, killing them within four days.

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Recovering Josie joins carol concert

BY LIN JENKINS

JOSIE RUSSELL, the girl who survived the brutal attack that killed her mother and sister, celebrated Christmas and her own painstaking recovery by joining a school carol concert yesterday.

She and her classmates from the small village school in Goodnestone, Kent, sang carols and performed the Russian nativity

play *Baboushka*. Josie, who was left for dead after the attack as she walked home with her mother and sister five months ago, has had intensive therapy to restore her speech.

Yesterday she played the part of a peasant in the school production put on for parents in parish church. Shaun Russell, 45, who is returning to Wales where he and his wife Lin, 45, brought up

Josie, nine, and Megan, six, said: "She could mouth the words and it was fantastic. I had wondered why the hymn sheets for *Baboushka* were lying in the lounge at home. I was surprised and pleased by that."

Kent police were still interviewing Robert Friar, 35, an unemployed local man, last night about the murders of Mrs Russell and Megan.



St John-Brooks: returns

New TES editor is appointed

BY DAVID CHARTER

THE next editor of *The Times Educational Supplement* was named yesterday as Caroline St John-Brooks. She will replace Patricia Rowan, who retires in April.

Dr St John-Brooks edited the education forum in *The Sunday Times* before becoming assistant editor of *The Times Educational Supplement* (TES) in 1990. She left in 1994 to become administrator for educational research and innovation at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris.

Sir Edward Pickering, chairman of Times Supplements, said: "We had an impressive shortlist, but with her previous TES experience and recent three years studying education practice and policy around the world, Caroline St John-Brooks led the field."

Mrs Rowan, a former member of the *Sunday Times* Insight team, joined the TES as a sub-editor in 1972 and became editor in September 1989. Average weekly sales were 128,400 last year.

England at war: how the other half feasted

BY TIM JONES

CHRISTMAS 1643, and the Civil War was at its height. The Earl and Countess of Bath, however, decided that they would drink and make merry during the festive season as usual.

Henry, the 5th earl, and his wife, Rachel, were able to impress their guests with exotic food and spices from distant lands. To ensure the feasts at Tawstock House, near Barnstaple in Devon, were convivial, they stocked their cellars with more than 200 gallons of wine and beer.

The details of 17th-century life in one of the country's grand houses have been unearthed by Dr Todd Gray, a history lecturer at the University of Exeter.


Most of the staples — haunches of beef, mutton, venison and game — would have been available locally, he said. But the dried fruit and spices would have been obtained from the port of Bristol. They included currants at £3 9s 9d; filbs of almonds at 12s; lb of mace at 16s; and ginger at 2s 6d.

The cooks would have prepared pastry dishes in advance, including blackbird, guinea fowl, turkey and hare pies. The household also ate huge amounts of oysters.

Dr Gray discovered the accounts, thought to have been lost when the house burnt down in 1887, in the archives of Kent County Council. They showed that the earl and countess spent more than £25 a week on food when ordinary workers lived on £20 a year.

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Life sentence to begin with questions about girl

Women's knife attacker is suspect in murder case

BY DANIEL MCGORRY

A MILKMAN given three life sentences yesterday for knife attacks on two women is to be questioned by detectives about the unsolved murder of a teenage schoolgirl.

Colin Ash-Smith, 28, abducted his first victim from outside her home, stabbed her in the neck and back and tried to rape and strangle her. Three years later he forced another woman into a factory yard, slashed her throat and stabbed her 16 times.

He was sentenced at the Old Bailey after admitting attempted murder, kidnapping, attempted rape and causing grievous bodily harm.

He will be questioned about the murder of Claire Tiltman, 15, who was stabbed to death in January 1993 in a dark alley at Greenhithe, Kent, 200 yards from where Ash-Smith attacked one of the women. Detective Superintendent Nick Biddiss, who is leading the murder inquiry, said outside court yesterday: "We want to talk to him again about her murder. He is central to our inquiries."

Ash-Smith was at Claire's party three days before she was killed. He attended her funeral with his mother, a close family friend, Diane Ash-Smith, resigned as Mayor of Swanscombe and Greenhithe when her son was charged in October 1995.

Claire's mother, Lin, is con-



Murder suspect Colin Ash-Smith and Claire Tiltman



vinced that Ash-Smith is the murderer. "At least now he will not be able to hurt anyone else," she said yesterday.

In court Ash-Smith was described as a dangerous fantasist who worshipped the comic-strip hero Superman. The rented bedroom he shared with his girlfriend was stacked with pornography, war game magazines and more than 350 science fiction videotapes. When he carried out his attacks he wore a Superman T-shirt.

Five days before Christmas in 1988 he grabbed a 27-year-old cleaner outside her home and dragged her for a mile and half to waste ground in Swanscombe. He told her: "I have a gun and a knife. Don't scream or I'll kill you."

He cut off her underwear

with the four-inch knife and repeatedly plunged it into the ground next to her face while he tried to rape her. He also forced her to pose for indecent photographs.

Robert Fischel, for the prosecution, said that Ash-Smith boasted to his victim that he had "raped and murdered a number of women in London. But he only did it once a year and hated the sight of blood". He then stabbed her in the neck and tried to strangle her with a school tie, which snapped as she lost consciousness. Ash-Smith left her for dead after stabbing her five times in the back.

When police asked him if he had meant to kill her, he replied: "Well, I suppose so."

In October 1991 he abducted Charlotte Barnard, a care

assistant, as she left a pub in Greenhithe. He cut her across the throat with a flick knife then forced her into a factory yard, where he stabbed her 16 times in the back and hands as she fought to protect herself.

Miss Barnard, who has since moved abroad, collapsed and held her breath to convince him that she was dead. After walking away he took his girlfriend for a night out.

When police arrested him they found notes of four assault plans. In a diary he had written an account of the first attack, which he described as his "masterpiece". The court was told that psychiatrists at Broadmoor considered that his schizoid personality condition was untreatable.

Passing sentence, Mr Justice Wright said that Ash-Smith should not be eligible for parole for at least 15 years. He told him: "From your late adolescence you have been driven by abnormal urges of a violent and sexual nature and those urges have for many years led you to fantasise about aggressive and sadistic behaviour."

"It is eminently plain you are an appallingly dangerous man... You have no real understanding or remorse for your behaviour."

"You are far too dangerous to be at large. Whether you will ever cease to be a danger must be a matter of very considerable doubt."



Lucia Crichton-Miller, centre, at the funeral of her father, Sir Laurens van der Post, in Chelsea yesterday

Prince pays last respects to mentor

THE Prince of Wales led mourners at the funeral of his friend and mentor, Sir Laurens van der Post, yesterday. The Prince comforted family members at the service at Christ Church, Chelsea, for the South African-born writer and explorer who was his "spiritual guru" and godfather to Prince William.

The handwritten card on the Prince's wreath read: "For Dear Laurens. With everlasting gratitude and affection - always, Charles." Sir Laurens died peacefully, aged 90, at his home in London in the

early hours of Monday morning, after his heart failed. The Prince had visited him three hours before his death and had planned a ninetieth birthday party for him at Highgrove, his country home in Gloucestershire, last Friday.

The Prince entered the church with Sir Laurens's daughter, Lucia Crichton-Miller. Ten minutes later, after a choral prelude, pallbearers brought in the coffin covered with roses. Mrs Crichton-Miller led the mourners, followed by Sir

Laurens's six grandchildren. Lawrence Hughes, his American publisher, gave the address, calling Sir Laurens "one of the most remarkable human beings of our century". The service was conducted by the Rev Thomas Hiney, a chaplain at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. He described Sir Laurens as a visionary, poet, soldier, sage, an inspiration and explorer of land and the human spirit. A cremation service was held after the service at Putney Vale, southwest London.



The Prince comforted his friend's close family

Supplier of Leah Betts drug told to warn friends

BY MICHAEL HORSNELL

A STUDENT who admitted helping to supply Leah Betts with the Ecstasy tablet that killed her was told to warn his friends about the drug's dangers when he was given a two-year conditional discharge yesterday.

Mr Justice Kay told Stephen Smith, 19, of Basildon, Essex: "There is something you can do within the community to help - that is to go back among your student friends and to spread the message among them as to just how dangerous Ecstasy is."

Smith's former best friend, Steven Packman, 18, from Laindon, Essex, was told that he would face a retrial over his alleged part in supplying the tablet which Miss Betts took at her eighteenth birthday party in November 1995. The jury had been discharged after it failed to reach a verdict.

Sarah Cargill and Smith's girlfriend, Louise Yedey, both 18, received police cautions after admitting their part in the chain of friends which supplied Miss Betts.

The judge criticised the management of Raquel's, the nightclub in Basildon where four tablets were bought for Miss Betts and Miss Cargill. Smith, the court was told, said

a youth had approached a dealer at the club and bought the drugs on his behalf.

The judge said: "I am satisfied that Raquel's nightclub was known among the young as a regular source of drugs. I have heard evidence from the then manager that he was not aware of this. If that is true, then in my judgment it was the result of wilful blindness."

"The head of security at the club has given evidence that he knew only too well of the problem. The appointment of a man with such a bad criminal record only serves to demonstrate how little effort was made to stop the supply of drugs in these premises."

"I make no findings against any individual. But collectively the management has a far greater responsibility for these tragic events than any of you, young people."

Miss Betts slipped into a coma at her home in Latchingdon, Essex, from which she never emerged. Her life-support system was switched off five days later.

The judge added: "Some of those young people who take Ecstasy fool themselves into believing that there is no risk that it will harm them. The truth is unfortunately that, if the drug is taken, there is a possibility that it will kill."

"Drug-dealing was a 'calculated' trade and should always merit as lengthy a jail sentence as possible, he said, but he accepted that Smith had not bought the drugs for financial gain.

Miss Betts's father, Paul, 50, later praised the judge and said: "I am not after blood. I just wanted to find out the whole story. I think the judge has acted with great fortitude and foresight. He has been able to gauge the part Smith has played."



Leah Betts died after taking Ecstasy at party

Youth found guilty of Mills attack

A member of a teenage gang was found guilty of causing grievous bodily harm to John Mills, 58, husband of Barbara Mills, the Director of Public Prosecutions. The 17-year-old, who cannot be named, was also found guilty of robbery by Knightsbridge Crown Court. He was remanded into custody for a pre-sentence report.

Professor killed

Professor Keith Ruddock, 57, the estranged husband of Joan Ruddock, the Labour MP, died after being struck by a car in south London. He was Professor of Biophysics at Imperial College, London.

Budgen fined

A supermarket has been fined £23,000 after a woman died after being knocked over by a faulty automatic door. Phyllis Johnson, 79, hit her head as she fell at the Budgen store in Fakenham, Norfolk.

Bail refused

Roisin McAliskey, 25, the pregnant daughter of Bernadette McAliskey, is to spend Christmas in prison after bail was again refused. She faces charges over a British barracks bombing in Germany.

Firework ban

Ministers have imposed an immediate ban on the sale of aerial shells and maroons, the type of mortar-launched firework responsible for the death of two people at bonfire parties last month.

Damages appeal

South Yorkshire Police are to appeal against a £20,000 High Court damages award to John McCarthy, 35, of Liverpool, whose half-brother died in the Hillsborough football stadium disaster.

Patient saved by phone call

SURGEONS saved the life of a patient after receiving instructions on how to carry out an operation in a telephone call to heart specialists.

Doctors on the Isle of Wight had no time to transfer the 60-year-old victim of a stabbing accident to the mainland and

were forced to call Southampton for help. Brian Smith, who had fallen on a knife while walking upstairs peeling an apple, was rushed to St Mary's Hospital in Newport with internal bleeding.

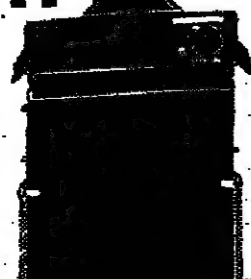
Peter Donaldson, one of the surgeons, said: "It was an

unusual injury but sending the patient to Southampton would have meant a delay of 90 minutes and in this case it could have been crucial. We did not know what extra damage would be caused by airlifting him and the ferry would have taken too long."

Mr Smith had a small hole in the front of his heart caused by the blade of the knife. "We telephoned Southampton where this type of operation would not have posed any problem," Mr Donaldson said. "The doctors gave me some general advice about what to expect and the problems we could face."

Mr Smith was given 16 pints of blood during the operation. "It was a fairly simple procedure in the end I put my finger in the hole and my colleague stitched it up," Mr Donaldson said.

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OPEN EVERY DAY UNTIL CHRISTMAS

God's judgment tries to rekindle hope from remnants of failure



The writer is Vicar of the University Church of St Mary's, Oxford

In the days before Christmas the Church thinks about judgment. This is because Christians wish to be ready and worthy to greet their King when he comes at Christmas, and it also links up with the expectation that Christ will come again, at the end of time, to judge the living and the dead. Thus, in the domestic excitement of Christmas, we see the ultimate purpose of God.

On the surface, judgment is portrayed as something imposed from outside by a God who sits in a heavenly court. However, from the spiritual

perspective, judgment has to start from within a person, with a bit of honesty about one's own limitations and the readiness to see the good in other people. I once had the privilege of visiting Mother Teresa at work in Calcutta and I felt humbled by the commitment and self-sacrifice of her team of workers in trying to bring some dignity to the extreme poor of the city. I was forced to face the question of whether I could have done this work myself—and found myself overawed and daunted. Sometimes we feel judged by other people's

goodness—an act of generosity, self-giving, or courage in adversity—and ask, "Why am I not like this?" This is awe, and awe is a state of self-knowledge, when a person sees him or herself in the light of a greater perspective, and is challenged by it.

The experience of awe, which seems a rather neglected part of modern religious

life, is to do with fear and admiration. In the Christmas stories, the shepherds were filled with fear when the angel told them of the birth of Jesus and, when the Wise Men arrived to see the infant Christ, they fell down and worshipped him. Why were they overawed? Because they had come face to face with God, and they felt judged by

his goodness and his love. There is some mysterious ingredient in this timeless story that, in the clamour of the modern world, still has the power to awaken in a person the seriousness of the challenge that love, goodness, truth and beauty makes on human life.

The obverse side of judgment, which is rightly and often emphasised pastorally, is the need for affirmation—no one should feel guilty, put down, disheartened, undervalued, inadequate. The uncorrupted child may feel judged and overawed by the

standard of First XI footballers, but his ability must be affirmed and he must be helped to fulfil his potential, however limited. The same applies to relationships and to morality: we need affirmation and encouragement in order not to mess up our relationships.

Not all will be saints, but all should strive to be the best they can. And God's underlying affirmation of all people is symbolised at Christmas by the fact that he comes in humility, as an outsider, and temporarily homeless. This means that God's judgment

is itself creative. It is not only concerned with sorting sheep from goats, and seeing justice done, but about the building and rebuilding of lives, trying to rekindle hope from the shattered fragments of failure. This is perhaps the awesome perspective of Christmas: that it offers a fresh start with a child who shines as a light in the world, offering hope that is not sentimental because it stems from the eternal justice and love of God.

At Your Service.
Weekend page 11

Wealthy Catholics are putting Eton before Ampleforth

BY RUTH GLEDHILL, RELIGION CORRESPONDENT

LEADING Roman Catholic independent schools are calling for greater support from parents and bishops as increasing numbers of wealthy Catholics send their children to other public schools.

Although demand for a Catholic education in the grant-maintained and state sector has never been higher, public schools such as Ampleforth and Downside are concerned that Catholic families are passing them over in favour of a more secular or Anglican education at leading non-Catholic schools.

Two Catholic independent schools, Buckfast Abbey preparatory school in Devon and Belmont Abbey, near Hereford, have already closed, and at Downside, near Bath, numbers have fallen by a third in 20 years.

Eton, which appointed a Catholic chaplain in the early 1980s, now has about 300 Catholic boys, compared with just a handful 20 years ago. Marlborough and Epsom have followed Eton's lead in appointing Catholic chaplains, tapping a hitherto inaccessible source of pupils.

Father Anthony Stuch, Head Master of Downside, which charges £3,800 a term, said that Catholic parents were keen to be accepted by the Establishment. "There is the idea that we can now get into Eton and hang on to our souls at the same time," he said. But he was also being "bombarded" by non-Catholics desperate to send their children to a Catholic school because of its moral ethos.

Father Stuch criticised the "league-table mentality" among some parents. "People don't seem to believe that a fully Catholic education is of as much value as league-table results," he said. "Schools are

being judged by league tables rather than by ethos."

Laity and clergy are alarmed by the trend. They want to arrest the large decline in Mass attendance, highlighted in the 1997 *Catholic Directory*, and believe that the way to do this is through the Catholic education system.

Header Leo Chamberlain, Head Master of Ampleforth College, the Benedictine public school in North Yorkshire, has criticised bishops for saying "all too little" about the importance of Catholic



Chamberlain: he urges bishops to speak out

schools. Yesterday he said: "There has been a trend for some secular schools, particularly in the private sector, to offer particular arrangements for Catholics. But a school with a Catholic chaplaincy is not the same as a Catholic school. And the opportunity to go to Sunday Mass is not the same as an education immersed in the culture, spiritual values and moral codes of the Church."

While more wealthy Catholics are choosing a non-Catholic education for their children

in the independent sector, some of the most loyal parents at Ampleforth, where fees are £12,555 a year, are Anglican. More than one in ten of its 644 pupils are non-Catholic, and the number is growing.

The religious education debate has taken on an added urgency in recent weeks in the light of the moral campaign launched by Frances Lawrence, widow of the murdered headmaster Philip Lawrence. In a recent address to the Catholic grant-maintained schools conference, Father Chamberlain said that it was part of the responsibility of Catholic schools to ensure that the results of Mrs Lawrence's campaign were lasting.

"The steeply rising rates of divorce, the abandonment of marriage, the campaign for an active homosexual lifestyle to be regarded as of equal legitimacy to heterosexual, the discovery of serious moral failures within the Church—all this contributes now to a sense of crisis in which we fully participate," he said.

He gave warning of a danger that Catholics would lose their way because of the new openness. "Schools are rightly perceived as standing at the centre of national concerns because it is there, after the family, that the shaping of personal futures lies," he said. "Catholics want their own schools so that our vision of man as made in God's image may be passed to another generation."

He said that parents' wishes had to be respected, but referred to the Church's policy that Catholic children in non-Catholic schools should still be given a proper Christian education. "It is difficult to conceive how this can be done as well in the circumstances of a secular school."



The Rev Ernal Kirby is the first black Methodist to be appointed a district chairman, the equivalent of a bishop. Mr Kirby, 45, who was born in Antigua, is to head the London North East District, which extends from the capital to Cambridgeshire and the Essex coast. He is currently a tutor in ethics at Queen's College, Birmingham

Hume calls for hope in the face of pessimism

BY RUTH GLEDHILL

CARDINAL Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster, yesterday urged Christians to shake off the prophets of doom. In a series of Christmas messages to the 4.4 million Roman Catholics in England and Wales, he said that, despite widespread unease in society, there were signs of hope.

He said in the *Catholic Herald*: "It is fashionable at the moment to be gloomy. There is widespread anxiety about economic stability, unemployment, the future of Europe, the quality of education, health and family life. No aspect of life, the Church included, escapes the pessimist's pen."

And in *The Tablet* he suggested that unease had been fuelled "most powerfully, perhaps, by the appalling tragedy of Dunblane". But he said that this sentiment could, paradoxically, be seen as a sign of hope and of health.

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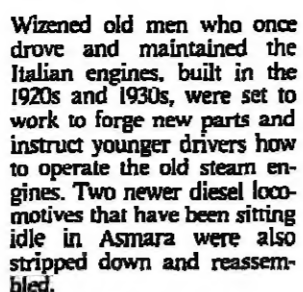
PEASANTS and former guerrillas have scoured the barren hills of Eritrea, collecting the old rails and sleepers from improvised defensive trenches. Rusting steam trains have been brought out of old sheds, burnished, oiled and lovingly restored. Retired railwaymen have been mobilised. Next month President Afewerki of Eritrea will formally inaugurate the restoration of one of Africa's most spectacular narrow-gauge railways.

In Mussolini's day, when the Italians ruled Eritrea, steam trains used to puff up the line from the Red Sea port of Massawa through Asmara, the capital, to the Sudanese border. During the 30-year civil war between Ethiopia, which annexed the former colony in 1952, and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front, both sides ripped up the rails and dug sleepers to reinforce their street obstacles and positions. The railway, a marvel of engineering, lay in ruins.

When Eritrea achieved independence three years ago,

an international consortium told the Government that it would cost £250 million to restore the line. There were two options: sell the remaining track and rusting locomotives to the Saudis for scrap or restore the line themselves. They chose the latter.

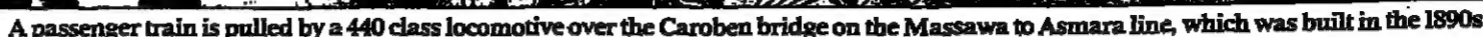
In August 1995, hundreds were employed to re-lay the sleepers and haul the rails back to the old trackbed.



The first 30 miles of track are already in operation, and the entire 75-mile section, linking Asmara and Mussawa, is virtually repaired. The project has cost around £3 million.

Built in the 1890s, the line, with a gauge of just less than a metre, is one of the most extraordinary feats of colonial engineering. Twisting through gorges and over viaducts, it climbs almost 7,000ft above the hot coastal plain.

The line once ran for 221 miles, linking up with the Sudanese rail system. But there is no likelihood of re-commissioning the entire stretch: Sudan and Eritrea are at virtual war after the Khar-



tourism Government's attempts to destabilise its neighbour by trying to export Islamic fundamentalism.

The railway once owned 18 oil-burning steam engines. They never ran fast: even the recently renovated ones are limited to 25mph. Evelyn Waugh vividly described the

Eritrean line in Scoop, poking fun at the trains that lumbered up the mountain so slowly that passengers had time to get off and pick berries on the way.

Eritrea's determination to rebuild the line is typical of the self-help philosophy it has invoked to overcome the ravages of the war with Ethiopia.

President Aferwerki, currently on his first visit to Britain since taking office, insisted that his country was not like other Third World nations, demanding Western aid and falling into debt. "We are trying to mobilise our own resources. We have a very prudent approach to borrow-

ing." Mr Afewerki said that he preferred to see business partnerships with Western countries and, turning his back on the former Marxist rhetoric of the liberation front he once led, spoke of investment, self-reliance, the private sector's role and his cordial relations with the World Bank and

International Monetary Fund
The President's foreign policy is equally pragmatic: when a row blew up with Yemen over the occupation of a small Red Sea island, he agreed to international arbitration. The tribunal is sitting in London and Mr Afewerki says he will respect its decision.

**FROM JAMES BONE
IN NEW YORK**

Paris: A French advertising campaign for Evian mineral water featuring photographs of naked children has been abandoned after complaints that it could encourage paedophilia. (Adam Sage writes).

The campaign sparked protests that it was insensitive after revelations in Belgium about Marc Dutroux, the self-confessed paedophile kidnapper. The Dutroux affair has caused deep anxiety in France, where cases of child molesting have since been given widespread publicity.

Seattle: Carl Sagan, 62, the Pulitzer Prize-winning astronomer and storyteller who exalted the grandeur and mystery of the universe in lectures, books and on television, has died of pneumonia at a cancer research centre in Seattle. He had been suffering from preleukaemia syndrome, a bone marrow disease. (AP)

Obituary, page 19

Nairobi: Burundi's Tutsi-dominated Army was said to have massacred up to 500 Hutu civilians in what Amnesty International called a continuation of a "policy of systematic extermination of a section of population". The rights group said the massacre took place in Butaganza commune on December 3. (AP)

The living quarters of an oil tanker was destroyed by a fire off the Falkland Islands. Eight of the 18 Latvian crew were taken ashore suffering from smoke inhalation and minor injuries, but they later recovered. Firefighters put out the blaze on the Panamanian-registered vessel. (AFP)

Jakarta: President Suharto, who first sought voluntary donations, has now ordered individual and corporate taxpayers in Indonesia with annual incomes of more than £26,000 to contribute an extra 2 per cent, after tax, to a fund to help the poor. (AP)

Delhi: Embarrassed Indian scientists yesterday conceded that they had been hoaxed by a "miracle herbal fuel".

A report tabled in parliament by the Department of Science and Technology said an analysis of the liquid produced by Ponnaiah Ramar Pillai, from the village of Idayankulam in the southern state of Tamil Nadu, showed it to be a mixture of paraffin and camphor.

"The mixture was intro-

BRITISH thespians might be busy mounting their much-trumpeted invasion of Broadway but that does not mean they do not have time for tea.

Several dozen of Britain's leading actors took a break from storming New York this week to attend a high tea at the stateliest Players Club in Greenwich: Square Park.

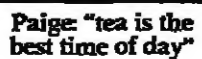
The likes of Elaine Paige, Michael Gambon, Fiona Shaw and Stephanie Beacham donned paper crowns, pulled crackers and munched cucumber sandwiches while bemoaning the excitability of American audiences, lack of British news, and inconveniences of the Big Apple.

"I take tea in London, darling, absolutely," said the irrepressible Paige, who has won acclaim for her performance as the ageing diva Norma Desmond in Andrew Lloyd Webber's Broadway production of *Sunset Boulevard*. "Tea is the best time of day," she explained.

The unprecedented event was the "drunken inspiration" of Nicky Henson, making his Broadway debut as the foppish Lord Goring in Peter Hall's revival of Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. "In the middle of the first night I said 'we ought to get all the Brits together,'" he said.

The high tea was served at large round tables covered with white tablecloths in the lounge of the Victorian clubhouse beneath a portrait of Edwin Booth, the club's founder and the brother of Abraham Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth.

Another at the party was Jim Dale. He has lived in New York for nearly 20 years and regularly offers visiting British actors tea on his terrace. "I know the feeling when you are all alone in a big city like this," he said.



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**Black America
wins place in**

Black American slang wins place in classroom

FROM GILES WHITTELL IN LOS ANGELES

BLACK American English has been officially recognised as a distinct language in Oakland, California, where black children who speak it are in a majority in schools but consistently achieve below-average results.

The move, which was swiftly attacked as lowering standards and "an insult to the cognitive abilities of black children", makes standard English a second language for 28,000 children and offers bonuses to teachers who learn their vernacular.

The Oakland resolution will send ripples throughout the state. It was welcomed by black education officials in Los Angeles, which faces similar problems, but flies in the face of Proposition 209, the measure approved by voters last month to end "affirmative action" programmes.

Substantially low scores by black children in English and reading tests have been a simmering racial issue in America's inner cities for decades. Blamed by traditionalists on the problem of bringing neighbourhood language to school, and by the authors of the controversial 1994 book

The Bell Curve on genetic differences between the races.

This week's unanimous vote by Oakland Unified School District officials gives black urban slang its own name, "Ebonics" — derived from "ebony" and "phonics" — and traces its roots to West Africa and slavery.

West and Niger-Congo African language systems form the basis of a distinct language spoken by black Americans historically isolated from mainstream English by slavery and segregation," the school district's resolution asserted.

Critics of the resolution have accused Oakland officials of mounting a ploy to qualify for extra federal funds for remedial English teaching for blacks on the same grounds that entitle the children of Spanish, Chinese and other foreign immigrants to extra teaching of English as a foreign language.

But Lucella Harrison, president of the school board, insisted that the move was aimed simply at helping black pupils who "tune out" as the sound of mainstream English in the classroom. "We tried remedial classes in the 60s and 70s and they did not work," she said. "We must do something different."

Seventy-one per cent of Oakland's black schoolchildren are in special classes and 64 per cent have been held back at least a year because of poor achievement — a state of affairs which Elihu Harris, Oakland's black Mayor, said should be remedied by conventional means.

"Our commitment is to excellence in education," Mr Harris said, "and we will not tolerate or support any form of substandard English." Other black leaders gave a warning against equating the problems of black pupils with those of immigrant children struggling with a new language.

"I know that Latinos speak a different language and I know my [black] cousins don't speak a different language," said Professor John McWhorter of the University of California, who is black. "It's an insult to black children."

Final consonants are also often dropped. Thus hand becomes han' and walking becomes walkin'.

English Ebonics

He goes to work He be goin' to work

She will be first She-uh be first

You're crazy You crazy

Six million dollars Six million dollar

My mother's name is Mary My mamma name Mary

It's a two of my friends It's a two of my friend

They have just come Despite being labelled distinct languages by Oakland officials, standard and "black" English do not have separate vocabularies. Major differences in the latter include a simplified conjugation of the verb "to be" with only the infinitive used in the present tense (hence he be goin' to work) and only the past participle used in the past tense (viz She been married for a long time).

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She will be first She-uh be first

You're crazy You crazy

Six million dollars Six million dollar

My mother's name is Mary My mamma name Mary

It's a two of my friends It's a two of my friend

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Hard man of Lima rejects Japanese calls for compromise with guerrillas



Fujimori has rejected any dialogue with terrorists

FROM GABRIELLA GAMINI
IN LIMA

PRESIDENT FUJIMORI came out of his colonial government office in the centre of Lima to face the hostage crisis in true South American style. It was clear that he was not in any mood to adopt the diplomatic stance favoured by his Japanese cousins.

"I am not going to have dialogue with terrorists and certainly not give in their main demand of releasing their imprisoned members," Señor Fujimori said in his first statement on the incident, 48

hours after the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement stormed the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima.

The wide gap between the President's approach and that of the Japanese Government is expected to delay efforts to resolve the crisis. Tokyo has urged a "peaceful, calm manner" to ensure the safety of the 460 hostages, including 150 Japanese diplomats and businessmen, who are facing their fourth day in captivity. Yukihiko Ikeda, the Japanese Foreign Minister, who arrived

in Lima on Thursday night, looked uneasy during an hour-long meeting with Señor Fujimori. Mr Ikeda said the priority should be the survival of the hostages.

It may be that Japan wants Peru to strike a deal over the release of some of the rebels. But after the meeting, the President said: "In Peru we have taken a tough stand against insurgents and will continue to do so." Señor Fujimori is known to favour the death sentence and has given a free reign to his security forces to "cleanse" Peruvian society of rebel sympathy, often

at the cost of ignoring human rights.

The President's authoritarian style first became clear when he staged a constitutional coup against his own Government in 1992, and closed down Congress and the courts.

He then held elections to give a democratic face to his second mandate, which began in 1994, but has not stopped intervening in all decision-making by issuing numerous decrees. In an interview last year, he said he was no fan of Western-style democracy, and that Peru had to be ruled with an "iron

fi". Señor Fujimori's parents left Japan in the 1940s and, like many Japanese immigrants, became shopkeepers. Their son studied hard, became an engineering lecturer and married into a well-to-do Japanese family.

Last year Señor Fujimori threw his wife, Susana Higuchi, out of the presidential residence, and she went to the press saying: "He has forgotten about his family's traditions and become a true South American dictator."

Peruvians confusedly call him *El Chino*, and he loves his nickname. "I speak Japanese with my three

children but my heart is with Peru. We do things differently in Peru. Democracy is a word for the West," he said during a local election rally last year, in which he dressed in a poncho and promised that he would "wipe out all terrorists no matter how much blood has to be shed".

Señor Fujimori is widely regarded as a populist who sees his stay in power as a personal pilgrimage. In the past few months, the President has spent more time changing the Constitution to allow him to run for re-election in 1999 than on any other issue.

Rebels threaten to start killing hostages today

PERUVIAN terrorists say they will begin killing the 460 hostages they are holding in the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima today unless the Government meets their demands.

They set the deadline yesterday and reiterated their central demand. The Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement gunmen want 438 of their imprisoned fellow rebels to be released, and safe passage for their leaders to jungle hideouts.

The conditions for the 460 hostages held on two floors of the Ambassador's residence continued to worsen yesterday as they faced their fifth day in captivity. Signs put up by them at the windows of the building read: "We have no water. No light."

Four more hostages were released, after five elderly Japanese were freed on Thursday.

President Fujimori's Government has rejected the terrorists' demands, raising fears that time for negotiations is running out. Mr Fujimori's stance has clashed with that of the Japanese Government, which has sent Yukihiko Ikeda, the Foreign Minister, to Lima to mediate. It insists that nothing should be done to risk the hostages' lives.

A British Embassy spokesman said British security specialists had arrived in Lima to advise the Peruvian security



Peru and Japan appear to be at odds over how to deal with the crisis, Gabriella Gamini writes from Lima

forces. American and German forces were also reported in Lima, to give advice. All Western representatives involved insist that the crisis should be resolved with "calm negotiations".

"We strongly deny that there are plans to storm the building with SAS shock troops. They are here just to give advice to the Peruvian services, and the security of the hostages is always a priority," said a British Embassy official.

Two Britons, David Griffiths, a businessman, and Roger Church, the British Embassy's deputy chief of mission, are among the hostages in the mock colonial building in the district of San Isidro.

Seventeen ambassadors, eight *chefs d'affaires* and diplomats from 30 countries, Peru's anti-terrorist police chief Maximiliano Rivera, and the Foreign Minister, Francisco Tudela, are among the hostages, who also include 150 Japanese diplomats and businessmen, and at least 150 members of Peru's political elite. The Red Cross has taken

on a mediating role and are delivering water, lavatory paper, towels and food to the door of the building. They also appear to be taking in messages from the hostages' relatives.

The rebels, who include a woman, are demanding the release of their leader, Victor Puyay, and Lori Berenson, 27, an American woman sentenced to life imprisonment for taking part in a failed attempt to storm the Congress in 1995. The Tupac Amaru have targeted the Japanese community in Peru before, which suggests they are trying to strike at President Fujimori, the son of Japanese immigrants, for courting Japanese investment and aid.

Rosa Elva, president of a Peruvian-Japanese Cultural Association, one of at least 100 women who were released from the building, said: "The rebels seemed very calm and collected. They were laden with weapons and heavy rucksacks and kept saying that things could go on for a long time. They were not nervous and seemed ready to give up their lives."

THE OPTIONS IN LIMA

1 Attack by stealth: a small body of troops move in to infiltrate the building using silenced weapons.

Risks: It may be difficult to enter without alerting the guerrillas and eliminating them before they start killing hostages.



2 Full-scale attack by special forces: a multi-pronged assault using CS gas and stun grenades.

Risks: The guerrillas watch the compound on television and it would be difficult to keep an element of surprise.

3 Military attack: an all-out assault using tanks, armoured personnel carriers and helicopters.

Risks: A notoriously risky way of dealing with this type of situation, the likely number of casualties is very high.



Foreign forces at the siege:
SAS
Delta Force
GSG9
United Kingdom
USA
Germany

Anti-terror teams weigh options

BY MICHAEL EVANS, DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

THE siege of the Japanese Ambassador's residence in Lima is being monitored by some of the most experienced counter-terrorist organisations in the world, including the SAS, the American Delta Force and Germany's GSG9. None is likely to recommend a siege-breaking assault because the odds are formidable.

Yet among these experts there must be developing a potential action plan that could be implemented as a last resort in the event of a deterioration in the negotiations with the Tupac Amaru guerrillas and the shooting of hostages.

These are the options:

□ Assault by stealth, in which a team of counter-terrorist special forces mounts an attack with silenced weapons in

TACTICS

an attempt to seek out the guerrillas.

□ A full special forces assault, storming the building, using maximum diversionary tactics.

□ A massive attack with troops and tanks, armoured personnel carriers and helicopters.

The third would pose the biggest risk for the hostages because of the likelihood of many dying in the crossfire. Key to any military plan would be the element of surprise, but the location is not encouraging. The residence is surrounded by extensive grounds and television cameras are relaying every movement in and around the

building. The guerrillas can watch their television screens for any sign of an assault.

An all-out assault by heavily armed troops has been tried before, with disastrous consequences. In 1985, about 100 people, including 11 supreme court judges, were killed in neighbouring Colombia in a siege of Bogotá's five-storey main lawcourts.

By contrast, in early 1980 members of the same M19 group invaded a cocktail party at the Embassy of the Dominican Republic and took 50 hostages, including the American Ambassador and 13 other envoys. The President, Julio César Turbay Ayala, spent 61 days negotiating their release. No one was killed.

With the third and most extreme option effectively

ruled out, the focus of any military option would be on a special forces operation. Provided they have the time to plan an assault, they have the weaponry, expertise and special equipment for a raid.

While the negotiations continue, an assault team will have the time to collect intelligence on the whereabouts of the guerrillas and hostages, the state of mind of the rebels and their weaponry. Some intelligence will already have been gleaned from those who have been released. It was a freed hostage in the Iranian Embassy siege in London in 1980 who provided a vital clue for the SAS when he described how the leader of the Arab terrorists appeared to be losing his credibility with the other members.

Niceties that must precede an attack

BY MARC WELLS

ANY plans to use force to end the siege have to take into account the legal complications involving embassies.

The invaded compound does not constitute an island of Japanese territory. But, according to the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the receiving state of a diplomatic mission suspends its right to exercise public powers over the embassy premises. Its agents, or other foreign forces, may not enter without the consent of the mission's head or the sending state's Government.

In principle, that inviolability persists even in times of national emergency or upheaval, as the International Court of Justice confirmed in

LAW

the 1980 Tehran hostages case. Forces such as the SAS would require a request from Peru before launching a rescue mission. Peru, in turn, must seek permission from Tokyo. If that cannot be obtained, the legal doctrine of distress might be invoked.

In several instances of hostage-taking in embassies, it was argued that the need to save the innocent must outweigh even the universal principle of the inviolability of diplomatic missions. The author is an Assistant Director of Studies at the Centre of International Studies in the University of Cambridge.

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Pro-Tibet film stars on Peking blacklist

FROM GILES WHITTELL
IN LOS ANGELES

ANGERED by Hollywood's love affair with Tibet, Chinese authorities have drawn up a blacklist of stars who will not be allowed to go there.

Harrison Ford, Brad Pitt, Martin Scorsese and Jean-Jacques Annaud, the French director, have been barred from visiting the remote and beautiful mountain region invaded by China in 1951, an official said yesterday.

News of the unusual blacklist emerged barely a week after the Walt Disney Company jeopardised its relations with China by refusing to halt production of *Kundun*, an epic being made by Scorsese on the life of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader.

In recent months Tibet has become the rugged retreat of choice for many Hollywood stars, and its demands for freedom have become their cause célèbre. Peking had informed Disney executives that it wanted work on *Kundun*, being shot in India, to stop.

After many years as a voice in the wilderness on the Dalai Lama's behalf, Richard Gere, the actor and a Buddhist, has been joined by other household names in calling for an end to religious repression and direct Chinese rule in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. Ironically, Gere's name is not on the list that was compiled by Tibet's State Security Office, an official from the Tibet Tourism Bureau said.

Ford is included with his wife, Melissa Mathison Ford, apparently because of her work as a scriptwriter on *Kundun*. Pitt, the heart-throb from *A River Runs Through It*, stars in a forthcoming film by Annaud about an Austrian prisoner of war who fled to Lhasa from India in the Second World War.

The Chinese move is a clear sign that Peking regards Hollywood as a powerful potential ally for the underground resistance movement in Tibet, led by monks, and for the Dalai Lama.

10p

THE TIMES

FEATURE FOOTBALL

IN MONDAY'S 10P TIMES

FOOTBALL DANCE

CHANGING TIMES

Unsteady Y goes on TV pledge come

LOW, Low, Low!

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Unsteady Yeltsin goes on TV to pledge comeback

FROM RICHARD BEESTON IN MOSCOW

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin yesterday told Russia that he would be back at his office in the Kremlin on Monday morning and planned a busy work schedule to make up for his six-month absence due to illness.

In the first televised address to the country since his heart bypass surgery six weeks ago, the Russian leader appeared to be fully aware of the most pressing issues facing the nation, but physically did not look completely recovered from his open heart surgery.

"The country needs an active and energetic president, especially now," said Mr Yeltsin, who wore a brown cardigan and open-neck shirt. "The doctors say, and I myself feel, the recovery period is over. On Monday the 23rd I will return to my office in the Kremlin. I'll be there at nine in the morning."

In spite of his positive message, the Kremlin leader still looked weak. At times he seemed short of breath and his right hand appeared to shake when it was not resting on his lap. His message to the people was also clumsily delivered. Instead of an address to the nation, his television appearance took the form of a well-rehearsed question and answer session with an unnamed interviewer.

Nevertheless, President Yeltsin may have gone some way to easing concerns in the country that he is out of touch

with the day-to-day issues of state. He outlined his priorities and correctly identified the crisis over unpaid wages and uncollected taxes as the main issue to tackle on his return to the Kremlin.

The problem of the debt crisis, caused by companies not paying taxes and the state not paying pensions and wages, has led to a series of economic and social problems, which he promised would no longer be tolerated.

"This country needs an active and energetic president, especially now"

A connected issue, which he said required his urgent attention, was the dire situation in the military, where lack of funding and low morale has led to repeated warnings from generals of a collapse in national security. He said he would personally oversee the drafting of a new military doctrine.

President Yeltsin described the Chechen conflict as a "knot which is being untangled with great difficulty", but promised that Moscow stood by its

peace agreement with the separatists.

There has been much speculation in Moscow about the possibility of a reshuffle of senior figures in the administration, and President Yeltsin did nothing to dispel rumours of a purge. He said that after reviewing the Government's work, including that of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Anatoli Chubais, the head of the Presidential administration, he had concluded that not enough effort had been made in tackling Russia's pressing problems in his absence.

Western diplomats said it was unclear whether the Russian leader intended to launch a sweeping reshuffle of his ministers and aides, although that could be the best way to reimpose his control over the affairs of state.

Whatever his true state of health, the Russian leader is now committed to re-entering the political fray and his opponents are already waiting for him. General Aleksandr Lebed, the former security chief who was sacked by President Yeltsin in October, said yesterday that the Russian leader was already drinking again and predicted that the country would not be any more stable with his return to the Kremlin.

"The President has gone back to drinking," he said on German television. "There is no hope in Russia any more."



Yeltsin on television: he looked weak and his message was clumsily delivered

Chechen murder suspects held

FROM RICHARD BEESTON IN MOSCOW

THE Chechen authorities announced yesterday that they had arrested suspects in the murder of six International Red Cross workers, and hinted the crime may have been orchestrated by Moscow.

Abu Movsayev, the top Chechen security official, said several people had been apprehended since Tuesday's killings, but refused to say more. "Unfortunately there are many people and powerful organisations inside Chechnya and outside the

region who want to make the world see our republic as a land of barbarians and bandits," he said, adding that the "visible war with Russia is over, but the secret war is continuing".

Over the past week a series of violent incidents has shaken confidence in the Chechnya-Russia peace deal and the future of the tiny breakaway republic, due to hold its first parliamentary and presidential elections at the end of next month.

Saiman Raduyev, a renegade Chechen guerrilla, seized 22 Russian paramilitary troops, the Red Cross workers were murdered, six Russian civilians were killed in Grozny and, lastly, a three-man delegation from a neighbouring republic was reportedly abducted by

Grozny. Guerrillas in Tajikistan — racked by civil war for four years — seized 23 hostages yesterday, including seven foreign United Nations military observers.

The hostage-takers threatened to shoot the 23 unless their leader's brother, held by opposition fighters, was released. (Reuters)

Paris bans Swiss cattle after BSE border blockade

FROM ADAM SAGE IN PARIS AND PETER CAPELLA IN GENEVA

THE French Government yesterday bowed to pressure from its cattle farmers and extended its ban on beef imports to Switzerland, the country worst affected by "mad cow" disease after Britain.

Farmers in eastern France have been pressing for such a ban, with some mounting a blockade of the border, on the ground that Swiss cattle could infect their herds and that importation of beef from the country was undermining consumer confidence. Austria, Germany and Italy have already taken measures to ban cattle from Switzerland.

Yesterday, Philippe Vasseur, the French Agriculture Minister, said Paris would ask the European Union to establish a common policy on Swiss beef, as it has with Britain.

"This precautionary measure is taken pending the official position of the European Union. It is justified by the absolute priority we place on protecting consumers," M Vasseur said.

Switzerland has reported 230 cases of BSE and Britain 160,000. The Swiss authorities say they will eradicate the disease through a \$500 million (£29 million) programme to slaughter at least 1,500 cows. But the programme was not enough to stem anger in France, where cattle farmers' earnings have fallen sharply this year.

Paris at first tried to resist farmers' pressure, arguing that a nationwide ban was unnecessary. However, local au-

thorities near the Swiss border paved the way for a government climb-down when they banned Swiss beef from the Doubs department in October.

Yesterday M Vasseur said some Swiss beef products could enter France under "exceptional circumstances" and tight sanitary conditions. But he said there would be no exceptions to the ban on Swiss cattle.

Despite the ban, French farmers at the Swiss border said yesterday that they would not stop their blockade of lorries carrying cattle. They have forced several such vehicles to turn back to Switzerland since Wednesday.

An official at the Swiss veterinary office said the French decision appeared to be motivated more by commercial and political criteria than by health matters. Last month 652 head of cattle were exported to France, as opposed to 28 between January and August.

The Swiss Farm Producers Association accused the French of "verging on hypocrisy". It claimed that French companies fraudulently relabelled contaminated British cattle feed and re-exported it to Switzerland before 1989, and that Paris had not taken action against them.

Austria, Germany and Italy banned Swiss beef imports several months ago. With 68 outbreaks of BSE in 1995, and 45 so far this year, the epidemic is regarded as declining in Switzerland.

Juppé finds top job hard to stomach

FROM ADAM SAGE IN PARIS

PRESIDENT Chirac has advised France's unpopular Prime Minister, Alain Juppé, to put on weight as part of his attempt to convince voters that he is a sensitive and "cuddly" sort of chap. Widely seen as cold and arrogant, M Juppé's attempts to improve his image may have been undermined by his slender and angular frame.

Faced with disastrous opinion poll ratings, the Prime Minister has been striving to earn at least sympathy, this week bringing out a book detailing the emotional torture he has suffered during his 19 months in charge of the Government. The work was ridiculed by the press, which said he should offer new policies, not intimate confessions. But, according to M



Juppé: advised to adopt a weightier image

Chirac, what France wants from its Prime Minister is neither a change of political tack nor a more human face — but a bigger belly. "The President often tells me, 'You ought to put on 10 kilos, people would find you more cuddly'. He's probably right."



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Royalists hope Senate role is prelude to popular Astrid taking throne rather than 'lightweight' brother

Signal for a future queen

BELGIAN royalists are musing again on a "dream ticket" for the future monarchy of their fractured country.

The excuse came when Princess Astrid, the daughter of King Albert II and Queen Paola, decided to exercise a royal prerogative and take a seat in the Senate.

The move late last month revived hope among many royalists that the popular and serious-minded Princess, 34, who was once high on the list of eligible partners for the Prince of Wales, could eventually reign instead of her older brother. Breaking with the quaint decorum which the Belgian media reserve for royalty, *Le Soir* wondered: "Is Astrid's decision... the sign of a possible preparation for

BRUSSELS FILE
by CHARLES BREMNER



exercising the royal function in the event that Prince Philippe refuses the succession?" The idea is not implausible. Uncertainty has lately surrounded the succession of the family which has ruled since Lord Palmerston persuaded the reluctant Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, uncle of Queen Victoria, to reign over the newly invented country in 1831. The rumours began in 1991 when the late King

Baudouin had the old Salic law changed to enable a woman to succeed to the throne. On the sudden death of the childless Baudouin two years later, many Belgians were surprised when Albert, the late King's brother, took the throne rather than passing it directly to his son Philippe, as expected. It was obvious to many that Princess Astrid, who is forceful, publicly ac-

tive, a staunch Catholic and mother of four, would make a good monarch.

In contrast, the unmarried Philippe, 36, is often depicted as a lightweight and ill-equipped for the job. The speculation subsided last summer when "Le Petit Prince", as he is known, proclaimed his intention of ruling, but now he has again been upstaged by his sister.

Their father, once known as a playboy, has emerged as a force for unity in the aftermath of the crisis over child murders, corruption and the separatist pressure from Flanders. But the Princess's supporters say that as a modern woman, a Queen Astrid would be even better at holding Belgium together.

"She has everything," notes one admirer. "She is a sainte-épouse... she's a leader, a perfect role model." On top of that, traditionalists love the fact that Archduke Lorenz of Austria, her banker husband, is a member of the Habsburg house, one of Europe's oldest dynasties.

For her maiden speech in the senate, Princess Astrid called for a moral reawakening, a return to family values and a rejection of the culture of selfishness which she implied, also afflicted the governing classes. Delivered as tradition dictates, half in Dutch and half in French, her speech was heavily applauded. Only the Vlaams Blok, the extreme-right Flemish party, walked out in protest.



Princess Astrid of the Belgians is sworn in as a member of the Senate

Bleak fable hailed as EU alarm call

PRINCE PHILIPPE does not emerge well from French-speaking Belgium's best-seller of the season. He is the weak future king in *Le Siège de Bruxelles*, a dark fable set in 2007, which is being both hailed as a wake-up call for Belgium and European federalists and vilified as an anti-Flemish tract.

The plot is set in a Brussels which has collapsed into a version of Sarajevo or pre-war Shanghai, with a rich European Union quarter guarded by international police while the impoverished locals, excluded from the single currency, scrounge for survival. The tale, by Jacques Neiryck, an engineering professor, weaves present fact with fiction to recount the takeover of Brussels, now a bilingual enclave inside Flanders, by a fascist Flemish Führer who is half English. The hero, his cousin, tries to save the country. To the cries of "All for Flanders. Flanders for Christ", Flemish militia wage "ethnic cleansing" against Walloons and Muslim immigrants.

A good read and fortuitously timed for Belgium's present mood of siege, the book has struck a chord because its premise is deemed to be just plausible. Flanders, prosperous and nationalist, is pulling away from the impoverished Walloon half of the country and predictions of the imminent break-up of Belgium are commonplace.

Mr Neiryck's yarn, now in its fourth print run since September, is also welcomed for its insights into the fate of the EU's federal drive. In his vision, the dawn of the single currency in 1999 has consolidated the carve-up of Europe as a Franco-German empire. Britain has become poor and impotent outside the EU, but it re-emerges with a vengeance in the book's climax.

Traditionalists want Santa sacked



St Nicholas: challenged by fat interloper

TO THE chagrin of traditionalists, Belgian children are more confused than ever this Christmas by the problem of duelling Santas. Like their cousins in The Netherlands, little Walloons and Flemings know that St Nicholas is an austere, thin, white-bearded old man in a bishop's mitre who turns up with presents on a boat from Spain on December 5.

Sinterklaas, as he is known in Dutch, is celebrated in schools and by a rush at the toy shops in early December. He is, however, increasingly rivalled by the jolly, fat, red-clad man who flies in three weeks later. The American-inspired Santa still misses most Belgian chimneys, but his image is omnipresent on television and in the shops. Unhappy over the confusion, church and parents' groups are urging shops to eschew the commercial interloper.

Seasonal subsidy for Lapland cheers tourist trade

FROM CHARLES BREMNER IN BRUSSELS

SANTA CLAUS may be delivering extra toys to Brussels this year. The gesture is the least the Commission could expect after it sent €102,000 of European Union funds to renovate his Lapland home and train his little helpers.

The subsidy from the EU's regional aid programme has gone to install more comfortable surroundings and a better workshop at the Santa Claus Office and Village at Rovaniemi, in the Finnish

Arctic, which he is said to consider his main dwelling.

Finland qualified for the aid, which includes €21,000 for training the elves to help him to reply to 700,000 letters a year, because the Lapland region is experiencing an economic slump. "It's not that we believe in Santa, but that this stimulates business and creates employment," said the spokeswoman for Monika Wulf-Mathies, Commissioner for the Regions.

The Rovaniemi complex, which now includes computers and video-conferencing for

Santa, draws tens of thousands of tourists to Finland, a big proportion on charter flights from Britain. Thirteen flights a day, and one by Concorde, have been bringing visitors to Rovaniemi.

The other day the Spice Girls dropped in with their wish list for Joulupukki, as Santa is known in Finnish.

"Now it's not so crowded, I can have a quiet chat with the very young children," a grateful Santa told visitors this week. "I'm able to have some of my books with me - like my guide to the world's chim-

neys." However the largesse of Brussels has upset the reinsurer at Santa's homes in Sweden and Norway, where local authorities also make much of the tourist potential. The Finnish authorities note that most children know Santa lives in Lapland: other countries receive only some 140,000 letters a year. The nearest rival, Drobak, near Oslo, gets half the visitors of Rovaniemi, Santa's Finnish helpers say.

The Santa industry is serious business for the Nordic states, as well as for Canada,

which has its own branch. Russia has lately joined the act with trips to visit Deyd Moroz (Grandfather Frost), a cousin of Santa, who traditionally turns out accompanied by an ice-maiden for new year festivities.

There was no comment on Finland's jingle bells subsidy from Nikolaus van der Pas, the chief spokesman for Jacques Santer, the Commission President.

Mr Van der Pas did, however, sign his Christmas card to journalists this year "Santer's Klaus".

Steel strikers riot in Belgium

Brussels: Hundreds of striking steelworkers rioted yesterday in Tubize to protest against a European Union decision to block subsidies designed to rescue their ailing company. Without the money, their steel mill faces bankruptcy with the likely loss of 1,826 jobs.

More than 1,000 strikers, some masked and armed with batons, smashed bank windows, wrecked telephone cabins and looted a police station, the Belgian news agency reported. (AP)

Greek ports protest traps British drivers

FROM JOHN CARR IN ATHENS

A FIVE-DAY strike by Greek dockworkers and merchant seamen has closed all the country's ports, stranding about 30 British lorry drivers in Patras, where they were due to get ferries to Italy.

The strike was scheduled to end at dawn today, but militant seamen's unions were yesterday threatening to extend it. The British Ambassador, Sir Michael Llewellyn-Smith, appealed to Stavros Soumalkis, the Greek Merchant Marine Minister, to help the Britons. "The Minister promised to do what he could," Gordon Bernard, the British Consul said.

The drivers were anxious to catch last ferries from Calais on Christmas Eve. "Any delay from Patras beyond Saturday, and they'll be too late," Mr Bernard said.

Yesterday afternoon it was hoped a few foreign-run ferries might leave Patras.

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Sure they are a little touchy on the question of money? *Au contraire!* Next month the BM launches its own Money Gallery, tracing the "amazing variety of ways in which filthy lucre over 4,000 years."

Actually, it is not *quite* the BM's own gallery. The new venture will be called the "HSBC Money Gallery", in somewhat fulsome acknowledgement of a donation from the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. Rumours that HSBC cashpots will be inserted into the BM's hallows are of course entirely delusional. No, sorry, *malicious*.

What does the BM's army of unworried curators make of all this? An unintended hint comes, perhaps, in a statement from the BM's press office. "In spite of its importance," the Bloomsbury innocents sniff sadly, "money is not easily understood." You can say

Yet so much else in Judge's revival is fine. Tim Goodrich has designed a lovely set, with a distant Windsor Castle look-alike across fields at least-enriched timbering that effortlessly changes from courtyard to house to pub. You might expect the ruds placed above the suits, and the baggy plus-fours to look like congausted neckbraces, but the mix of the Elizabethan and the vaguely modern seems agreeably exotic. And there are two wonderfully warm wives in Joanna McCallum (and understandably, given her man) a sometimes melancholy York.

Moreover, there is a genuine standout among the smaller parts. As the swoony French doctor, Caius, Guy Henry's wit and poise stay intact despite his having to spout more naughtily double-ended words than Shakespeare wanted. Why doesn't someone give this actor the bigger opportunities his sharp performances merit? In fact, why not give him his own sitcom?

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companied only by drummer Andy Stochansky and bass player Sara Lee (formerly of the Gang of Four), the mighty DiFranco cut a strong, mighty-severe figure in black flannelcoat and trousers, a ring around her nose, hair short and tufty. Her banter between songs was friendly but highly conning, as she jockily complained about always playing to audiences full of expatriate Americans, the trauma of seeing her reflection in a mirror and the nerve of certain representatives from dis-

style which she used to propel numbers such as *Blameless*, with its clipped, funky scat interludes, and jazz-like cut-

While many of her songs were driven by a quietly seething anger, there was poetry in her words. "The wind is ruthless/The trees shake angry fingers at the sky," she sang in *Pone*, *Wrong*, an unbearably poignant number in which her voice rose from the merest whisper to a raging snarl and back again.

It was a mighty impressive display which confirmed that DiFranco has the talent to become a major international star, capable perhaps of occupying a niche somewhere between Tori Amos and Alanis Morissette. Whether she will allow it to happen is another matter.

DAVID SINCLAIR

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Show Pavarotti a bent rusty nail and he'll sing like a dream.

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M A G A Z I N E

Mourning, the consolation of a philosopher

Daniel Johnson on the moral and intellectual legacy of Gillian Rose

Getting over bereavement is not only an intellectual but also a practical problem: it is not easy to turn the cerebral into the everyday. Mourning, which is active evocation and commemoration rather than a passive sense of loss, still seems the best and most natural response to death. The young Robert Burns wrote a dirge entitled *Man was made to Mourn*, and anyone who has been bereaved knows what solace the act of lamentation may bring.

Mourning is a state of mind unlike any other sadness, in that it cannot be cancelled out by happiness: time may soothe the pain of grief, but the sense of absence remains forever. Bereavement is absolute, a loss without hope of finding. Not even new life — the birth of a child or grandchild, say — can compensate for death. Hence reflections on mortality and immortality always have a funeral ring, as though we were only prepared to contemplate our own finiteness at another's obsequies.

Although mourning is natural, it must still be learnt. Small children do not understand death but they have some inkling of its horror. Soon after the death of her great-grandmother, my three-year-old daughter asked me whether she, too, would one day have to die. When I said yes, she burst into tears, wailing: "I don't want to die!" Not even the prospect of being reunited with Great Granny in Heaven could console her.

"I may die before my time," wrote Gillian Rose, the outstanding philosopher of her generation. She died, exactly a year ago, still in her forties, with all to live for. She had endured cancer for three years, and made the most of her time on death row by writing three books. The only one to appear while she was still alive was *Love's Work*, a harrowingly beautiful and teasingly indiscreet autobiographical meditation, which has reached a wide readership here and in America.

Love's Work revealed the evolution of Gillian's thinking from reason to revelation, from a secularised Jewish background via utopian Marxism to an ever-deeper immersion in Judaism-Christian thought. Her deathbed conversion to Anglican Christianity scandalised some, but she saw her whole life as the preparation for this supreme epiphany. Her baptism was the end of her crucifixion. She believed in order that she might understand her own disbelief; her philosophy understood the world in order to make belief possible again.

The first of what will be two posthumous books by Gillian Rose takes mourning as one of its central themes. *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge University Press, £9.95 paperback) brings together her political and religious ideas, to focus on one great perennial question: what is the law, mundane or transcendent, and whence does it derive its legitimacy?

In the first chapter of this strenuously demanding but rewarding book, "Athens and Jerusalem: a tale of three cities", Gillian Rose surveys the wasteland of our age from the vantage point of an intellectual determined to overcome her alienation. Athens is the city of rational politics; Jerusalem is its opposite, a Utopian community; while the invisible, internalised third city is that of capitalism, private property and modern legality. Modernity has also misbegotten a fourth city, the antithesis of

civic life, which is symbolised by Auschwitz. Through her urban metaphysics, Gillian sets herself the task of reinvigorating a disenfranchised humanity which squats in the ruins of hallowed civilisations.

The book has on its dustjacket a painting which meant a great deal to her: Poussin's *The Ashes of Phocion* collected by his widow. The statesman Phocion, 40 times governor of Athens, was unjustly condemned for treason and forced to poison himself with hemlock. His burial within the city walls was forbidden and to complete his disgrace, his corpse was cremated by a foreigner and was left unconsecrated.

Poussin's canvas is dominated by the Acropolis and its splendid buildings, but in the foreground Phocion's widow is gathering up her husband's ashes while her maid looks out for danger.

In discussing this picture, Gillian Rose recalls her correspondence with Sister Wendy Beckett, the popular art historian, who had devoted one of her BBC2 programmes to the Poussin. Sister Wendy saw the widow's defiance of the arbitrary tyranny of Athens, symbolised by the gleaming temples in the background, as an act of perfect love and self-sacrifice, which she equated with the idealised ethics of Jerusalem. Gillian Rose, the political philosopher, gently rebuked Sister Wendy, the anchoress, for her unwieldiness: "The gathering of the ashes is a protest against arbitrary power: it is not a protest against power and law as such... To acknowledge and to experience the justice and injustice of the partner's life and death is to accept the law, it is not to transgress it — mourning becomes the law."

What did Gillian Rose mean by her cardinal idea, "mourning becomes the law"? Most studious of women, the young Gillian sympathised with campus revolutionaries. Her first book, *The Melancholy Science*, acknowledged advice from Ulrike Meinhof, a West German journalist who became the co-leader of the notorious Baader-Meinhof terrorist group, and killed herself in 1976 while in prison. Meinhof's tragedy epitomised that of many German intellectuals — "Hitler's children" — but it was also an extreme case of a more general Western malaise that afflicted the 1960s generation: the politics of ideological despair.

But Gillian's politics moved on, and in her later writings she sought to reconcile the alienated intelligentsia to legitimate political activity *per se*. Her own mourning of the lost Utopia of the New Left had, especially since 1989 and the "end of history", become a fascination with the state, the church and their common factor: the law.

Gillian Rose was present not only about her own death, but also her friends' sense of loss, a loss which she refused to countenance. "I am living my dying," she used to tell us. She is gone all the same. There is solace in company. Her family, friends and students gathered recently in Bloomsbury to hear readings, to reminisce and to mourn. Jesus said: "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." We are still waiting to be comforted. Yet, as Gillian herself wrote, "The work of mourning is difficult but not interminable." If her death was the *terminus a quo*, the starting point, of her influence, her mourning is our consolation and her transfiguration.



Gillian Rose

The perils of writing about the living or the recently dead demand discretion, says Tom Pocock

At first it seemed that writing a biography would come easily to a journalist. After all, it is only an extended interview: 100,000 words instead of 1,000. But then the obstacles began to appear: the subject's self-regard, false memories and, most worryingly, the clutter of skeletons tumbling out of cupboards.

Also, whereas the journalist could feel supported by the power of the press, this would be an encounter of individuals, one to one. The biographer could become aware that his, or her, subject was so much more interesting and important than himself. Could one have half-emulated the feats of this war hero, or written anything half so memorable as this literary lion? Of course not.

So, first of all, a degree of inferiority must be overcome, but not to the extent that breeds a chippiness. The relationship between biographer and his living subject is a delicate one. Am I a magistrate or a counsellor? Am I asking what to him, or her, and to me, sounds an impertinent question because it is important to understanding, or because I want to cut him down to my size?

When a biography is "authorised", and the biographer depends upon his subject's co-operation, the problems are obvious. Does he ask the embarrassing questions and, if so, does he accept an answer he suspects is, at best, evasive? If the subject seems to have

How a biographer survives a survivor

been as careless as a trusting archbishop, does he publish and be damned as a betrayer of confidence? If he sticks to the agreed rules and his subject's veto, does he write a second book a couple of years later which, it might be argued disingenuously, is not hampered by such constraints? If the biographer yields to that temptation, he can expect serialisation in a Sunday newspaper and also, perhaps, blackballing by the literary club he had hoped to join.

Having attempted two books about living people and recognised that because of scruples, the portraits were not as rounded as they might have been, I turned to subjects who had died within living memory. On these voyages of discovery, the surf could also be breaking on the reefs. Families and friends may have cultivated fond legends and can be reluctant to risk challenge, let alone demolition, even if neither is the biographer's intention.

There was the Edwardian literary lion, whose grandson — a

formidable naval officer, long retired but with a reputation for ferocity when roused — was guardian of the flame. His grandfather's imaginative prose was obviously vulnerable to amateur Freudian analysis, and an overkill of psycho-babble had recently been applied by another biographer who, the guardian made it clear, would risk grievous bodily harm if he again sought access to the archives.

Another literary figure had, his daughter confided, been a philanderer, and she was reluctant to see his achievements diminished by scandal. The agreed solution was that she would provide all possible help — including access to unpublished letters and diaries — on condition that she could be the first to read the typescript and, if necessary, censor it. She agreed that the philandering could not be ignored but the biographer had no wish to make a meal of it and a compromise was reached, the daughter, showing magnanimity and tolerance.

However, it emerged that one particular mistress had been a major influence on the writer's life and work — and she was not only alive but still married to a famous husband who might, or might not, be aware of her infidelity. It was unnecessary to name her in the book, only to identify her by a few references to those who already knew the story.

Having no wish to embarrass, this biographer tried to warn the lady in question that she would not be recognisable to readers of her late lover's biography. This proved impossible, since she lived abroad and a mutual friend, who agreed to convey the message, lost heart at the thought of the husband opening his letter by mistake, or picking up a telephone extension.

So, without such a warning to the former mistress, the book was published. Then, without warning to the biographer, the lady met him by chance at the house of another mutual friend, where the book was prominently displayed on a drawing-room table. Did she realise who

he was and that he knew her secret? Was he able to ask her the questions about his subject that he had longed to ask? I will never know; we talked only about the weather.

Such near misses have prompted me to adopt the Hundred Year Rule. When the subject will be no dead for a century there will be no snarls from defensive friends, and even descendants will be likely to see failings as entertaining, if not lovable.

Yet here, too, are problems. After months of reading letters, diaries and accounts by contemporaries, the biographer will have got as close to his subject as the laws of mortality will allow.

One danger is that without an animate being to concentrate upon, the vacuum is filled by the biographer himself identifying with his subject: "I can see why you wrote about him," they will say. Or, as the author may know more about his character than anybody else, there is the risk of becoming proprietorial. The discovery of a letter showing the subject acting out of character — or what it was assumed to be — can prompt a Lady Bracknellish reaction worthy of an outraged friend or relation: "He would never have behaved like that!"

Tom Pocock's most recent book is *A Thirst for Glory: The Life of Admiral Sir Sidney Smith* (Aurum Press, £19.95).

Desperately seeking sainthood

Evita Peron had everything it took to achieve secular canonisation

When Alfred The Great's granddaughter Princess Eadburga was a child, her parents set her a test. They asked her to choose between a pile of jewellery and a Bible. The girl was no fool. She chose the Bible.

She was revered, loved and eventually canonised. St Eadburga. These days she would be declared BBC Personality of the Year.

The craze for secular saints seems to know no bounds. Its climax, or nadir, is the current competition for the nation's most distinctive personality run by BBC Radio's *Today Show*. The contest testifies to the maxim that tabloid journalism is best left to tabloids.

This year's six finalists were blatantly nominated by suggestion on the programme.

The Conservative Party traditionally organised this award for Baroness Thatcher, who won it seven times while at No 10. She was pipped in 1990 when the supporters of one Lal Krishnan Advani out-organised the Tories and the contest was declared invalid by the ever-lofty BBC. This year the party got its act together and delivered John Major as the only male finalist.

There are things that the Conservatives can still do well. Labour's response was too obvious and fell into the Advani trap. Tony Blair's nomination was banned.

Any contest that pits a prime minister against a Burmese freedom fighter, and the two of them against a group of fame-for-a-day heroines, has to be daft. An outcome that is decided by who can organise the most anonymous telephone votes is a contest in button-pushing.

Will the anti-gun lobbyists out-vote the anti-homosexual lobbyists? Will the wounded teacher outvote the brave widow? The BBC claims to be combining the public's yearning for saints with its love of a horse race. Lord Reith would cry from his spinning grave, what is wrong with the saints (and horse races) you have already? The

answer is that they cannot be granted a heckle-free interview on the *Today* programme, that modern ceremony of beatification. Either way it would surely make more sense to use MORI or Gallup.

Which brings me to Evita Peron. Nobody ever heckled her on the radio. She was the secular saint of the century, now reincarnated by the anti-saint, Madonna. The original stage portrayal by Elaine Paige was cynical, kitsch and great fun. The film version is reportedly brilliant. The theme of both is that since all power is corrupt and founded on cosmetic appeal, why not do it in style? Make the politician a saint and have done with subtlety.

Everyone who encountered the Peronist phenomenon testified to the charisma of this woman. She died of vaginal cancer in 1952 at the age of 33, or as she put it, 31. Her life story — poor country girl

turned mediocre actress turned fascist moll — was banal. What no dramatist can reproduce is her manipulation of crowds, and thus her skill at collectivising human responses to her appeal.

There have been many explanations for the success of Peronism in the 1940s. It mobilised the new industrial working class (Evita's *Descamisados*) against landed wealth. It grew fat on the postwar boom in commodity prices. But Evita's exorcism from the rich to sustain her incipient welfare state was highly personalised. It bribed her husband's trade union supporters, substituting veiled menace for tax enforcement. She personally handed out benefits to the poor each week in front of the cameras — an idea John Major might consider in his hour of need.

This was politically unremarkable. What was astonishing was Evita's ability to move a mob beyond tears to a sort of mystical adoration. Her public life seems to have been conducted before a perpetual mass congregation. She was loved by the poor for her attacks on the rich. She finally renounced the cry of the crowd for



Evita the adored: "a messenger with little by way of a message"

her to become vice-president in 1951, doing so on a giant "bridge of love" next to her husband while aeroplanes wrote her name in vapour in the sky.

In her last great speech, Evita, dying of cancer, cried out over a throng estimated at a million in central Buenos Aires that she would one day return to them. She beseeched them to love Peron. She loved them. "La vida por Peron", she cried, and collapsed in pain in the arms of her presidential lover.

This was political theatre of a high order. Pandemonium broke out across Argentina. Shrieks festooned every church and Masses were sung. Miracles were duly declared. And when the dying Evita voted for her husband from her hospital bed, women knelt to kiss the urn carrying her ballot paper.

Evita achieved the apotheosis of dying young and thus living for

ever. Her body was embalmed and carted around the world (with decaying facemasks to defy thieves). It was returned to Buenos Aires after Peron's short-lived restoration to power in 1974. It now rests in the Recoleta cemetery, where the tomb is said to be proof not just against grave robbers but against a nuclear bomb.

In his biography of Evita, Nicholas Fraser argued that she was not a true cult. She was certainly vilified by the anti-Peronists who later put her clothes, including her underwear, on public display and portrayed her as "a whore with a whip". It was hopeless. The clothes were seized as instant relics. The sceptical writer V.S. Naipaul was mesmerised by the respect for her sanctity. "She is without dates or politics," he wrote after her death. Even her successor in Peron's affection, Isabelita, venerated her remains and brushed the hair on her cadaver.

Small wonder the film script of Evita was handled with kid gloves as it travelled the globe. Watched by a horrified Argentine nation, it made its sorry way from Ken Russell to Zeffirelli to Attenborough to Coppola to Oliver Stone. Evita's bird-like ghost took on the more substantial forms of Faye Dunaway, Meryl Streep, Liza Minnelli, Diane Keaton, Michelle Pfeiffer and finally Madonna. The last at least had the qualification of craving the part as much as had Evita herself.

As Fraser concludes, Evita has thus achieved the immortality she yearned for — "within the limits prescribed by the late 20th century". A standard jest among Washington officials is that the key to your reputation in a crisis is who gets to play you in the movie.

Evita's record was, to put it mildly, dubious. She was a messenger with little by way of a message, a voice with few words. But she touched a nerve deep in a people's subconscious.

Naipaul saw her cult as rooted in Latin admiration for sexual allure combined with female submission. Her reunciation of vice-presidential power was the ultimate act of feminine piety. The Juan and Evita show was "the passion play of dictatorship", arbitrary power attuned by love. Hence the Masses, the shrines and the miracles in her name, all of which continue to this day.

An application to canonise Evita was made to The Vatican after her death. It was made by the Argentine trade union movement and was short-lived. Evita would appear to fail on a number of counts. But modern sainthood, like that of the early Middle Ages, takes many forms. It can also involve the most improbable subjects. Secular sanctity lies not with the authority of any church. It lies in the minds of readers, viewers and listeners.

This sainthood is merely the cult of personality. Its temple is the media. I have no doubt that a reincarnated Evita would sweep the *Today* programme shortlist. Like Violeta in *La Traviata*, she would die with a quiver of love on her lips and the nation would go berserk.

As for Madonna, I have an uncomfortable feeling that her team, with a battery of telephones, could achieve victory for her too. Perhaps they should have launched the film a month ago.

Cook and tell

STEAMED puddings are the fuel driving the Conservative campaign machine, according to Chandos Elletson, until the summer head chef at Conservative Central Office. He is in the middle of writing a book detailing the eating habits of his Tory former paymasters. Elletson, 34, is the brother of Harold Elletson, Conservative MP for Blackpool North, and ran the CCO kitchens for a year.

"I call my book a cook and tell,"



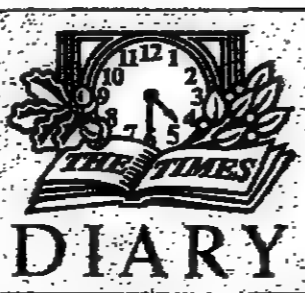
Pickles: more pudding

says Elletson. He reveals that when he was cooking there, Brian Mawhinney, the Tory party chairman, loved egg and chips, much against the wishes of his staff who wanted to keep him on healthy salads. When he felt like a proper plateful, Mawhinney would have to call down to the kitchens on his private line and whisper for "the usual". It would then be brought up to him to disappointed snorts from his secretaries.

Eric Pickles, MP for Brentwood and Ongar, according to Elletson, is "a man who likes his food", a fact obvious from even the most perfunctory look at his robust physique. He and Sir Graham Bright, MP for Luton South, both important Central Office figures, would order special helpings of Elletson's tremendous steamed puddings at peculiar times of day.

Douglas Hurd, says Elletson, was a quite extraordinary trencherman. He will not, however, reveal any more. "Hurd is just too good," he teases. "I am saving it for the book."

Any spare Christmas cheer should be pushed the way of Hugh



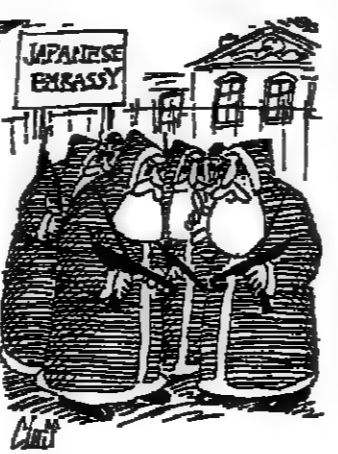
Laurie, comedian. On Thursday evening, at a party for Rowan Atkinson's production company, Laurie played the keyboards in a band led by Lenny Henry. He looked as though he had just found a hole in his favourite trousers. "I've never seen Hugh looking so down," said one guest. He was just completely *Les Misérables*. His agent, clearly suffering from the same ennui, angrily declined to offer an explanation.

Night moves

LINCOLN Cathedral's loss is the village of Partney's gain this year as the Bishop of Lincoln, tired of the in-fighting among his deans, is dreading there for Christmas. The Rt. Rev Robert Hardy will be presiding over midnight mass at the

village's 14th century church. "After the Bishop announced his boycott of the cathedral," says Canon Raymond Rodger, the Bishop's personal assistant, "he asked the rural dean if there was a vacant parish. Partney was suggested and the Bishop accepted."

The parishioners, who have not had an incumbent vicar for over a year and were contemplating cancelling the service, are now hard at their preparations, led by the unflappable Miss T.M. Maddison. Currently bowling through her eighties and a churchwarden for 12



"Remember, who dares wins"

years, she cooks great vats of pheasant soup which she dishes out after the Mass every year. "It was a bit of a bonfire at first," she says, "but it will be quite straightforward. We shall have the simple Series II Communion service followed by soup and chat."

Lucky dip

CHRISTMAS in the White House is traditionally a Bing Crosby sort of affair, but the Clintons are doing their best to give it a twist. Guests arriving for the round of thank-you-for-your-support dinners this week are asked to reach into a glass bowl from which they pick out a table number and place at random. Each table is hosted by one of the Clintons or one of the Gores. The Vice-President and his wife are reportedly showing an excess of affection on the dance floor.

An explanation has at last been offered for the sinister container truck parked by the White House recently. It is the egg nog truck. For two parties only, it pumped out 40 gallons of the stuff.

Age game

EARLIER this week, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hosted her



Monsignor Gilbey and the Queen Mother: esprit d'escalier

annual dinner in the library of the Travellers Club in Pall Mall, her favourite room in London. She was wandering down the splendid main staircase when she came upon Monsignor Gilbey, the former Catholic chaplain to Cambridge University and now a permanent resident of the club, pottering up to bed.

Gilbey, 95, has always been a huge admirer of the Queen Mother, but to his great frustration had never met her. Recognising Gilbey, the Queen



Mother said "Excuse me, I believe I'm a year older than you are." "You can't be," said Gilbey, his quiet walk disturbed.

"There is only one woman a year older than me, and that's the Queen Mother." And on he carried to his room.

The Queen Mother paused for a moment, then ambled off as well. She has booked the room again for next year.

P.H.S



NO ELGIN, NO MARBLES

A civilised case for keeping the glory of the British Museum



A contrast must strike anyone who looks at the frieze of sculptures from the Parthenon and who contemplates the political battle which has raged around them in recent years. Phidias's craftsmen made marble ripple like waves: the procession which they depict is fluid, thrilling and intriguing. The war of words over the marbles' location is precisely the opposite: static and predictable exchanges take place with fixed weaponry.

An undaunted Greek Government has launched the latest of many diplomatic and public relations campaigns to remove the Elgin Marbles from the British Museum and restore them to Athens. To judge by the media headlines, the case for moving the marbles is gaining ground. The Government in Athens is preparing a contract to build a new museum to house the frieze. Members of the European Parliament have signed a petition for restitution. A fashion for sending objects of importance "back home" is taking hold. America has sent Mycenaean gold back to Greece; France is considering giving the Hottentot Venus back to South Africa. Many now see Lord Elgin as a thief, albeit of fine pedigree, and the sculptures as stolen goods that should be given back to their rightful Greek owners.

This tide of opinion has not yet, however, become a tide of events. Although the Greek Government has hinted at legal action before the European courts, no move has been made. The European Union has no authority over the marbles; neither the International Court of Justice nor the European Court of Human Rights has any better locus. Attempts in the 1970s and 1980s to agree universal restitution guidelines have all failed. The planned museum remains a speculative gamble and may come to be one of the most expensive pieces of architectural blackmail ever constructed. Aside from the museum, the Greek case has barely altered for the past 25 years. The late Melina Mercouri was an advocate with flair, but with no new themes.

The case for the return of the marbles remains essentially that the Parthenon is a building of unique significance to Greek national culture. This argument deserves tougher scrutiny than it usually receives. The Parthenon was the symbol of one frequently very unpopular Greek city whose legacy of art, thought and democracy has only recently been honoured close to home. The disputed works were one small part of the building's original users and neglected by their writers. "No Elgin, No Marbles" is a saying that does not just apply to the rescue of the works from decay, bombing and pollution: it is when sited in London and inspiring some of the greatest romantic and classical artists in Europe, that the marbles have become themselves.

Ideas and images do shape national cultures; but they are also exchanged between them with extraordinary ease. The work of ancient Greeks moulded modern Europe's ideas of itself. After James Stuart and Nicholas Revett anchored in an obscure

corner of the Ottoman empire in 1751, their sketches of Athenian ruins and remains began a fashion for all things Greek which flowered for more than a century and remains alive to this day.

When they went on show in London in 1807, the Elgin Marbles took firm root in British life. William Hazlitt, one of the first men gripped by the thrill of gazing on matchless carving, said that the procession of horses, chariots, warriors, bulls, priests and children "do not seem to be the outer surface of a hard and immovable block of marble, but to be actuated by an internal machinery, and composed of the same soft and flexible materials as the human body". The marbles inspired Keats, Hardy, Haydon and many others; the relationship between marbles and museum fascinated Forster, Virginia Woolf and Louis MacNeice. Politicians and philosophers came also under the spell.

After support for Greek resistance to Ottoman rule came into fashion, enthusiasm for a long-neglected culture passed back to Greek nationalists. But the Parthenon's importance emerged from the research of British and German scholars. Accusations of cultural imperialism, sometimes made by Greeks complaining of Elgin's removal of the marbles to London, are a dangerous weapon in a Europe where so much intellectual traffic has travelled in so many directions over so many centuries.

Englishmen even taught Greeks to resent Lord Elgin. The most eloquent case for the marbles' return came from an Englishman resident in America. Until the rebirth of modern Greece after the Second World War, the dispute over the marbles was conducted entirely by Britons. Postwar Greek complaints about the removal of artefacts can be found, but they include hardly a mention of the frieze.

Today roughly 40 per cent of the marbles remain in Athens, 60 per cent in London; other fragments reside in Palermo, Rome, Copenhagen, Paris and Heidelberg. A complete plaster reconstruction of the frieze already exists in Basel, and the British Museum is negotiating to help the construction of another in Nashville, Tennessee. Both places are unbundled by ownership arguments over a treasure which belongs to the world; but their desire to show as much of Phidias's work as they can suggests a way out for everyone.

The British Museum has accumulated 150 years of experience in reproducing the frieze; before the war, the marbles were displayed alongside reproductions of the remaining segments. Could Greece not be offered that expertise to display the frieze's full sequence, using high-quality reproductions of the portions in London? Cultural nationalists would not be satisfied, but millions of tourists would see and learn much more than they can now. Moving the marbles solves nothing. Completing them, in London, Athens and imaginative places elsewhere, would be to spread the message of this miracle of man's art.

ARCANE, HE CALLS IT

The voters know a wriggling politician when they see one

Sometimes it is easy to despair of this Government. True, it has no majority; granted, it is riven by arguments over Europe. There is an unmistakable smell of defeatism in the parliamentary ranks. But so many of the Tories' problems arise not from these circumstances: they are entirely of the leadership's own making. The case of the cheating whips is a prime example of self-inflicted damage made worse by the Prime Minister's misjudged response yesterday.

Behind the adversarial public face of Parliament lies an intricate network of co-operation between opposing parties. "The usual channels" are used to negotiate anything from the timetabling of a Bill, the membership of committees to future business in the House — plus, of course, the pairing of absent MPs.

Crucially, these back-office workings of Parliament depend upon trust. That trust was betrayed on Monday, when a Tory pairing whip, Derek Conway, was caught double-dealing in an attempt to fix a vote. As it happened, the Government would have won the vote anyway; but the whip did not know that the Unionists were behind him when he did his nefarious work. Had they gone the other way, the Government would have won the vote only thanks to his deeds.

Mr Conway's action itself was wrong and misconceived. But the reaction to it by senior ministers has made a bad situation so much worse. Yesterday the Prime Minister, no less, dismissed the crime as "an arcane dispute" and added: "quite what misunderstandings occurred here I don't know." He has had four days to find out.

His deputy, Michael Heseltine, was just as dismissive, and equally slippery, when the affair was first exposed. He claimed to know nothing about what went on in the Whips' Office — which is odd enough for a parliamentarian of 30 years' experience, but

even odder for the man put up by the party expressly to field questions about what went on in the Whips' Office.

Norman Tebbit, never a politician to hold back when ruthless measures needed to be taken, has also described Mr Conway's action as "cheating". He claims to have talked to three former Conservative Chief Whips, all of whom agreed with him. "This is no way," he said, "for the Tories to win an election." He is absolutely right.

What Messrs Major and Heseltine seem not to realise is that most members of the public do not approve of cheating. When a cheater is caught, they expect at least contrition, if not a straightforward apology. Even the most amoral of politicians could surely see that it is in the Conservatives' interests not to attempt to minimise what everybody else recognises as an offence. They should have come clean, expressed embarrassment that it had ever happened and promised to ensure that it would not happen again.

Now that the ruse has been exposed, it could not be repeated anyway. Why not make a virtue of having clamped down on sharp practices? Why not apologise for overzealotry and make a token sacrifice in the Whips' Office? Instead the Prime Minister has tried to pretend that nothing bad happened in the first place, and has insulted the intelligence of voters by claiming that it was too arcane for them to understand.

If Mr Major wonders why he and his party are unpopular, he should stop looking at the favourable economic statistics and begin to examine the aura that surrounds his administration. Sleaze is followed by dissembling, made worse by dodgy dealing and compounded throughout by an inability to apologise. Could that possibly explain the Tories' lamentable performance in the polls?

Call for clarity on progress to EMU

From Colonel W. A. Allen, Royal Tank Regiment (retd)

Sir, Despite Mr Major's denials, there is now every indication that the political momentum behind EMU in the rest of Europe is so great that it will take place whether it makes economic sense or not.

It must now be beyond doubt that the type of Europe which Mr Major says he wants is simply unattainable. Every pronouncement by any other European leader shows a clear determination to achieve a form of union going far beyond anything which would be acceptable to the vast majority of the British people.

We have therefore only two alternatives: to accept the progressive loss of political and economic sovereignty which continued membership of the EU on present terms will bring, or seek to renegotiate a purely trading relationship with the Union, similar to that we thought we were voting for in 1975.

The choice is urgent. As EMU is introduced, as majority voting is inevitably extended and as membership of the Union widens, our negotiating position will become progressively weaker.

The solution is in Mr Major's hands. Rather than hanging on until May in the hope that something will turn up, he should call a general election early in the new year seeking a mandate to renegotiate our membership as a purely trading partner, co-operating in other joint ventures if and when it is in our mutual interests.

This would be in the nation's interest, in Europe's interest and in his party's interest. It would accord closely with the wishes of a clear majority of the British electorate, it would avoid our acting as a continuing obstacle to what the rest of Europe appears to want, and it is the only possible way in which his party could win the next election.

Yours faithfully,
ANTHONY ALLEN,
Pool House, Long Street,
Great Ellingham, Norfolk.
December 16.

From Mr John Redwood, MP for Wokingham (Conservative)

Sir, The letter from the Director General of the British Bankers' Association and others (December 16) is right that it is in Britain's interests that any new European currency should be legal. The problem with the euro is that it is a different currency from the one we use in the treaty.

Britain should say that it will take a treaty amendment to legalise the euro. The letter you published is quite wrong to say the other member states can press on with the euro without our votes to try to legalise it.

Recital 8 of the regulation helps undermine the legal status of the euro. It points out that an EC regulation cannot guarantee the legality of the euro outside the 15 member states. There is already one court case under way questioning the euro. There could be many more in the financial markets of New York and Tokyo if Britain does not insist on legalising the euro properly.

We have a veto. We owe it to business to use it to insist on a legal single currency and to demand European policies that work in the interests of British business. Britain at the moment has a bad deal in Europe. We need to negotiate a better one. When you have a veto there is no need to appease policies which will not work.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN REDWOOD,
House of Commons.
December 20.

From Miss Adrienne May

Sir, Browsing in Pears Cyclopaedia 1966/67 I find the following exchange rates, dated March 12, 1966. I also cite the tourist rates ("Bank sells") given in The Times today:

	1966	1996
Austria Sch	72.2	17.59
Belgium Fr	139.2	51.73
Canada \$	3.09	2.20
France Fr	13.7	8.44
Germany Dm	11.2	2.52
Hong Kong \$	16.1	12.46
Japan Yen	1012.2	186.80
Norway Kr	20.0	10.50
Sweden Kr	14.4	11.14
Switzerland Fr	12.1	2.14
USA \$	2.79	1.62

In view of this slide in the value of sterling, why should we wish to retain the pound, and why should we entrust our governments with control of the economy?

Yours faithfully,
ADRIENNE MAY,
2 Burton Close,
North Walsham, Norfolk.
December 17.

A soldier's identity

From Professor J. D. Fage

Sir, What is all this nonsense about the bodies of British soldiers killed in France in 1917 being found wearing "dog-tags" (report, December 16)?

As late as our war in 1939-45, we wore "identity discs".

Yours faithfully,
J. D. FAGE,
Hafod Awel,
Penmal, Machynlleth, Powys.
December 16.

Weekend Money letters, page 28

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN Telephone 0171-782 5000

Critical look at the Prince of Wales's approach to Islam

From Dr Ali Wasil

Sir, The Prince of Wales has boldly tackled a battery of mighty topics (report and article, "Islamic spirituality and the decline of the West", December 14): God, Islam, the Koran, incarnation, the cosmos, scientific arrogance and tyranny, modern materialism, our environment, ethics and morality, BSE...

A Muslim blessed with many years of Christian, Western and scientific education, enjoying American and British paradise, I know many here will "not buy" the Prince's opinions on such controversial and touchy issues. They will ask: If Islamic society is so good in confronting modern evils, why do so many from Muslim nations desperately escape to USA and Europe? Why so much misery, inequality, injustice, corruption and warfare among Muslims?

Some, too, will question the future occupant of Buckingham Palace and owner of a vast material empire attacking "materialism". Didn't Jesus tell the rich man to first give away all his money before he can find spiritual life?

But I hope none of this will detract from the important work of the Prince in promoting respect and understanding between the peoples of the West and Islam. He is doing in Britain what the Muslim Emperor Akbar and the Buddhist Emperor Asoka did in India. I trust women and men of goodwill in West and East will wish him great success. Insha'Allah!

Peace be with you,
ALI WASSIL,
109 Guilford Street, WC1.
December 14.

From Dr Tony Sargent

Sir, During the course of 1994 three Iranian Christians — Bishop Haik Hovsepian-Mehr, Pastor Mehdi Diba (an evangelical scholar and theologian who had been imprisoned for nine years) and the Reverend Tateos Michaelian, Presbyterian leader of the Protestant Churches in Iran — were all slain by the Islamic authorities.

In September this year the body of Pastor Mohammed Yusefi, a 35-year-old minister, was found hanging from a tree in a forest near his home in Gorgan. He was the seventh Iranian

Christian to gain a martyr's crown since the revolution of 1979.

This may explain why my Iranian colleagues tell me that they were astonished to read of Prince Charles's unorthodox comments about the Islamic "integrated spiritual view of the world". And even more by his assertion that we should engage in an "exchange of teachers" for we "need to be taught by Islamic teachers how to learn with our hearts as much as with our heads".

Religious teaching other than Islam is prohibited in many Muslim countries. The Christian Church in Saudi Arabia has been forced underground; and the situation in Iran is mirrored in Sudan and to a lesser extent in Pakistan and Kuwait. Yet the liberty that Muslims rightfully have to practise and proclaim their faith in the West is beyond dispute.

The Prince's preferred title in a future role is "Defender of Faith". Many Christians who respect aspects of Islamic culture and the Holy Koran would welcome a royal voice to speak out now against persecution, the beheading of "apostates" and interpretations of the Koran which permit dismembering the hands of thieves and the public flogging of adulterers.

Sincerely,
TONY SARGENT,
The Working Tabernacle,
Chapel Road,
Worthing, West Sussex.
December 16.

From the Reverend Don Brewin

Sir, I am always pleased when eminent seekers after truth encourage us to recognise it, wherever it exists. As Prince Charles points out, Christianity and Islam agree in challenging the materialistic spirit of our age.

But there is another side to the optimistic picture that Prince Charles paints of Islam. Last week I was with a group of Sudanese Christians in northern Uganda. In one of the refugee camps, about a month previously, Muslims had forced them to leave their houses at gunpoint, after which they set fire to the houses and to the bible school where they were studying.

Most of them have now found temporary sanctuary in the nearest town, but the threats have followed them, causing fear amongst the students and their families. In spite of this, the

depth of the Christian faith of these students and their commitment to the gospel of peace remain undiminished.

Maybe those Muslims who take seriously the Koranic teaching about God as the "all-merciful and compassionate" would like to join in condemning this overt act of intimidation? Then we might be persuaded that the call to mutual understanding comes genuinely from both sides.

Yours faithfully,
DON BREWIN
(National Director, SOMA
(Sharing of Ministries Abroad),
Wickham Cottage,
Caddesden Turn, Billington,
Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire.
December 17.

From Mr Ahmad Bullock

Sir, As a Muslim convert since 1942, with considerable experience of the immigrant community in this country and of Muslims overseas, I must take issue with the Prince of Wales's contention that Islam has any spiritual contribution whatever to make that will "arrest the decline of the West". I believe that the Prince and his advisers are entirely wrong.

Take for example the treatment of Muslim women by Muslim men in a matrimonial context — an area in which His Royal Highness can scarcely be said to have an outstanding record. The revelations in your Magazine of December 7, "Till death do us part", of wife abuse in Pakistan apply well beyond that country. They are appalling, they are entirely true, and such behaviour is distributed throughout the social classes equally.

Women are third-class citizens throughout the Muslim world.

Yours faithfully,

AHMAD BULLOCK,
62 Kelburne Road, Oxford.
December 15.

From Mr Kenneth C. Watson

Sir, So Prince Charles urges us to learn from Islam.

Would HRH like to tell us what we should learn from the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie?

Yours faithfully,
K. C. WATSON,
9 High Street, Lode, Cambridge.
December 16.

Wise after the event

From the Reverend Ivor E. L. Scott-Oldfield

Sir, Before there is a rush to nominate any present-day "three wise men" (pace Alistair Dickson's entertaining letter on December 17) it might be wiser for all concerned to reflect on the mistakes of their doubtless well-meaning predecessors, and the dire consequences of those errors.

They arrived approximately two years too late, going in the first instance to the wrong place — Jerusalem — and bringing inappropriate, though mystically correct, gifts to a child. They talked to quite the wrong, and worst person possible — Herod — and were indirectly responsible for a savage bout of infanticide.

Yours faithfully,
IVOR E. L. SCOTT-OLDFIELD,
11c Prior Bolton Street,
Canbury, N1.
December 17.

From Mrs Rosemary Callender

Sir, I would happily invite Yehudi Menuhin, Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh, and David Attenborough as proof that wisdom, in many guises, is available and appreciated today.

Yours faithfully,
ROSEMARY A. CALLENDER,
Penn Grove Lodge,
6 Penn Grove Road, Hereford.
December 19.

From Mrs Shirley Hughes

Sir, I am not sure whether my three personal wise men — George Steiner, Saul Bellow and Richard Dawkins — would particularly wish to be present at the birth of Jesus.

Yours faithfully,
SHIRLEY HUGHES,
4 Cedars Road, SW13.
December 17.

Moral education

From Mr Alan Millard

Sir, In the light of the moral debate, should day schools be opening on Sundays (report, December 16), or should Sunday schools be opening on weekdays?

Yours sincerely,
ALAN MILLARD,
8 Medina Court,
Marine Parade West,
Lee-on-the-Solent, Hampshire.

The wrong signals?

From Mr David Elias

Sir, You report (December 17) that a stage version of Wallace and Gromit is to tour Britain, "featuring actors in costumes".

Are there any plays that don't?

Yours faithfully,
DAVID ELIAS,
13 Clumber Crescent North,
The Park, Nottingham.
December 17.

A rigged vote

From Lord Bridge of Harwich

Sir, Rigging the vote (report and leading article, December 16) is the ultimate negation of democratic values. It is something we expect to happen under fascist dictatorships and in banana republics.

Hitherto I think most people believed it just could not happen in our mature democracy at Westminster. But what now? If the Government Whips' Office organised double pairings in the House of Commons on Monday, as reported, this was flagrant vote-rigging.

It was depressing to watch the evasions by members of the Government, including the Deputy Prime Minister, who were questioned about the matter on television last night. Mr Heseltine seemed to imply that, if the vote had

been distorted by "byzantine" procedures in the Whips' Office, this was of no consequence, since the Government would have won even without the double pairings.

This strikes me as setting a new low standard in political morality.

Yours faithfully,
BRIDGE OF HARWICH
(Crossbencher),
House of Lords.
December 18.

From Mr S. Hugh Mahoney

Sir, With Conservative votes now counting double, Labour's lead in the opinion polls does not look so secure.

Yours faithfully,
S. HUGH MAHONEY,
3 Guilford Court,
Lord Warden Avenue, Walmers, Kent.
December 18.

Aids prevention

From the Chief Executive of Aids Care Education and Training

Sir, Professor Michael Adler (letter, December 11) rightly reminds us of the shortsightedness of Britain's limited commitment to fighting the global spread of Aids. It is clear that 90 per cent of the Aids problem exists in developing nations — those least able to help themselves. Already there is a massive discrepancy between infection and death in the West (ten or more years) and in developing nations (about one year).

This organisation, with many others, has been providing sexual health education programmes in Uganda since 1990. Reports at this year's World Aids Conference showed that rates of HIV infection in some urban areas of that country, for the very first time, were stabilising and even falling. The main reason given was the success of the prevention campaigns. Prevention is still the only real way

we have against Aids.

Those who believe that the scale of what is happening across the globe will not have an impact on our shores and affect the wealth of our nation should think again. Many British businesses owe much of their wealth to the large-scale employment of cheap workers in developing countries. Some Western companies have already become aware of the devastation Aids is likely to wreak on their foreign labour force — and on future profits — and are already setting money aside for HIV prevention.

It is not only morally right to consider extending our assistance to such Aids-affected nations but it will become increasingly cost-effective to do so.

Yours sincerely,
PAT MACAULAY,
Chief Executive, ACET
(Aids Care Education and Training),
PO Box 3693,
London SW15 2BQ.
December 11.

Hong Kong treaties

From Dr Alan Lawrence

Sir, Sir Frederic Bennett (letter, December 17) has oversimplified the legal position in contrasting Hong Kong with Gibraltar. In 1842 by the Treaty of Nanking China ceded the island of Hong Kong in perpetuity. Similarly, in 1860 by the Convention of Peking Britain received a piece of the mainland just across from Hong Kong. This is now downtown Kowloon. It was in 1898 that the New Territories extending inland from Kowloon were added on the basis of a 99-year lease.

Mrs Thatcher did not have to give up the island and south Kowloon. She did so presumably because she recognised that the treaties were, as the Chinese maintained, "unequal", ie, they had been imposed by a superior British force.

Yours faithfully,
ALAN LAWRENCE,
University of Herefordshire,
Wall Hall Campus,
Aldham, Watford, Herefordshire.
December 17.

Soap and flannel

From Mr Nigel Nelson

Sir, As an *Arschers* fan I was startled by Matthew Parris's assertion that "you'd have to have a rather sad life to wish to employ your spare time keeping up with Ambridge" (article, December 16).

On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons both of us spend our time in the Commons sitting through live performances of that other, but inferior, national soap opera. Prime Minister's Questions. Is that not even sadder?

Yours,
NIGEL NELSON
(Political Editor),
The People,
One Canada Square,
Canary Wharf, E14.
December 17.

With the postal delays that often occur at this time of year, it is useful, where possible, for letters to be faxed to 0171-782 5046. Please give contact telephone numbers.

OBITUARIES

CARL SAGAN

Carl Sagan, astronomer and author, died of myelodysplasia yesterday aged 62. He was born in New York City on November 9, 1934.

The American physicist and astronomer Carl Sagan was best known as a populariser of science who made his name through a series of books and television programmes. He was a gifted communicator, although not always resisting the temptation to preach. In later years, a Pulitzer Prize behind him, his books diminished in real content as they grew in literary pretension. But his status as the leading media scientist in the United States was never in doubt, backed as it was by a compelling presence, good looks, and an enviable talent to explain.

Sagan was glad to have been born in the 20th century, the first moment in human history when man had the ability to leave the Earth and explore space. His lasting memorial is a plaque that will be carried through interstellar space for all eternity by the Pioneer space probe. Depicting a human body, some equations, and a map of the universe, the plaque was designed to tell any intelligence clever enough to decipher it where the Earth was, who inhabited it, and how advanced was their knowledge of the natural world.

"Astronomer, educator and author" was how Sagan described himself, and he was all three. His interests were wide, encompassing the origins of human intelligence, the possibilities of interstellar travel, the evolution of mankind and the consequences of nuclear war. He won many awards, even though his populist approach may not have endeared him to some of his scientific peers. The list of his awards alone, both national and international, occupied 30 lines in the current edition of *Who's Who in America*.

The son of a Russian immigrant, a tailor who went on to become a factory manager in New York City, Carl Edward Sagan grew up in New Jersey. His fascination for astronomy began at an early age, despite the fact that once, on asking for a book on the stars at his local library, he was "given a volume on Clark Gable. Although his parents knew little about science, they nurtured his enthusiasm and at school he proved an outstanding pupil. He won a series of scholarships to Chicago University from where he graduated with a BA degree in 1954 and a BSc degree in physics a year later.

With the help of a grant from the National Science Foundation, he stayed on at Chicago as a pre-doctoral Fellow in Physics and decided to concentrate on astronomy. In



1956, when he was only 22, he created his first public furor by announcing to the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that he had disproved the then current theory that vegetation existed on the surface of Mars.

By 1960 Sagan's thesis, *Physical Studies of Planets*, had earned him a doctorate in astronomy and astrophysics and he moved to the University of California at Berkeley, from where he promptly published an article in *Science* proposing a scheme for making the planet Venus habitable to human beings. After making a theoretical analysis of the planet's atmosphere and surface temperature — later confirmed, as accurate — by the Soviet space probe — Sagan suggested seeding the upper atmosphere of Venus with a species of algae which would, over time, absorb carbon dioxide and water vapour and replace them with oxygen.

This scheme was somewhat at variance with his concern, expressed a year previously, that microbes from Earth, carried into space by rockets and capsules, might contaminate the surfaces of the moon and the planets. Such contamination, Sagan claimed, might destroy valuable scientific evidence about the development of the solar system and the origins of life on Earth. His pleas were taken seriously by both the United States and Soviet Governments, which began to take steps to sterilise their space vehicles before the launch.

In 1962 Sagan took time off from his study of astronomy, taking a post instead as Assistant Professor of Genetics at Stanford University School of Medicine, where he worked with Joshua Lederberg, winner of the 1958 Nobel Prize. There he set out to prove the idea that life on Earth had originated from simple inorganic compounds indigenous to our planet, such as ammonia, methane and water. In laboratory experiments he produced amino acids — the building blocks of proteins — by exposing such materials to ultraviolet light and shock waves. It was thunder, he concluded, that produced most of the molecules responsible for the origin of life on Earth some 4 billion years ago.

Sagan moved to Harvard in 1963 to become Assistant Professor of Astronomy until 1968, when he found his academic

home as Professor of Astronomy and Space Science at Cornell University. He was becoming increasingly involved in the practical aspects of space exploration, and was hired by NASA to lecture the flight crews of the Apollo missions to the moon. Later he was responsible for the interstellar messages carried by Pioneer and Voyager spacecraft and was a member of the teams controlling the interplanetary explorations of the unmanned Mariner, Viking and Galileo space probes.

The possible existence of extraterrestrial intelligence was a constant fascination to Sagan, and in 1971 he was chairman of the US delegation to the joint conference of the Soviet and American Academies of Science, called to study the possibility of communicating with beings from outer space. It was this same obsession that led him to dabble with the phenomenon of unidentified flying objects, editing a scientific debate on the subject in 1972.

Although he remained sceptical about UFOs, rating them along with reincarnation, alchemy, telepathy and Santa Claus as "ideas which are charming if true," Sagan re-

fused to join those who rejected outright the notion of visitors from space. "Scientists are particularly bound to keep open minds," he wrote. "This is the lifeblood of science... I believe the search for extraterrestrial intelligence to be an exceedingly important one both for science and society. It is difficult to think of a more important scientific question."

But I do not believe that the most efficient method of examining this topic is via the UFO problem. The best hope for such investigations is NASA's unmanned planetary programme and attempts at interstellar radio communication."

Though politically independent, Sagan showed no hesitation in leaping to the support of causes, invariably liberal, in which he believed. In the light of history, his judgment was not always sound. In 1983 he led a group of scientists warning against the probability of a nuclear winter following any major nuclear exchange which could wipe out all life on Earth through the blotting out of sunlight. The thesis gained worldwide currency, providing fine ammunition for the Kremlin at the height of the final phase of the Cold War, though subsequent analysis showed that it was flawed. In 1986 he inveighed against the Strategic Defence Initiative — President Reagan's "Star Wars" — in a widely publicised debate with General James Abrahamson, director of the US Government's Strategic Defence Initiative. His judgment was at least consistent: later the same year he was among the 139 demonstrators arrested at the site of an underground nuclear test in Nevada. He was also active in the civil liberties movement, and in education for the disadvantaged.

Amid all this activity, while also carrying out active research at Cornell and appearing as a guest lecturer at universities around the world, Sagan still found time to write and publish a plethora of books. Most of his 17 works beginning in 1961 with *Atmospheres of Mars and Venus* and ending in 1994 with *Pale Blue Dot* dealt with one aspect or other of astronomy and space exploration, but he also explored the origins of life in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* in 1992 and the development of the human mind in *The Dragons of Eden* (1977). His one novel *Contact* (1985) was based on the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. "My fondest hope," Sagan wrote, "is that it will be made obsolete by the pace of real scientific discovery." He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for literature in 1977 for *The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence*.

Married three times, Carl Sagan is survived by his third wife, Anne, and by three sons and two daughters.

VINCAS BALICKAS

Vincas Balickas, former Lithuanian Ambassador in London, died on December 19 aged 92. He was born on May 11, 1904



VINCAS BALICKAS, the last surviving diplomat appointed by the independent prewar government of Lithuania, kept the flag of Baltic defiance bravely flying through more than 50 dark years of Soviet occupation.

Refusing to accept Stalin's incorporation of his small state into the USSR, the man who first arrived in Britain in 1938 lived to see the fulfilment of what must have seemed a futile dream. With the re-creation of an independent Lithuania after the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, his obstinate patriotism was triumphantly recognised when he was reappointed at the age of 86 to represent his country — this time as its Ambassador.

Throughout the Second World War and the Cold War that followed, it was his presence in London as much as anything that stiffened Britain's resolve never formally to recognise the incorporation of the three Baltic states into the Soviet Union. A proud, honourable patriot, Balickas also came to be the personification of Lithuania's independent spirit to the many exiles and refugees who had fled from Stalinist oppression.

Born in Virbalis, a small town in southwestern Lithuania, Vincas Balickas attended the Russian-language primary school there (Lithuania was part of the Russian empire then), learning to read and write Lithuanian at home. He was by all accounts a studious child and graduated with top marks from the Lithuanian gymnasium in the nearby town of Vilkaviskis.

In 1926 he was sent to study commerce, considered to be of first importance in the regeneration of a newly independent Lithuania, in Vienna. After completing his studies

there, he worked in the information and statistics department of the Bank of Lithuania, 1929-31. His work attracted the attention of the Foreign Ministry and he was invited to head up the economics and commercial section of ELTA, the official Lithuanian news agency, of which he served as director for a year. In 1935 he was appointed deputy director of the economics department of the Foreign Ministry.

He came to London in 1938, one year before the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact which was to seal the fate of the Baltic states for the next five decades, to work as commercial counsellor at the Lithuanian Legation. His knowledge and experience of commerce was to prove instrumental in deepening the increasingly important trading links between Lithuania and Britain.

The post of commercial counsellor at the Lithuanian Legation in London was considered to be particularly important. Balickas was certainly to prove to be up to the job. Unfortunately, the occupation of Lithuania first by the Soviets in 1940, then by Nazi Germany the following year, and again by the Soviets in 1944, meant that Lithuania was to lose its independence and cease to be a trading country in its own right for the next five decades.

From 1940 to 1967 he worked in the capacity of counsellor under Bronius Balutis, the envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain and The Netherlands. In the immediate postwar years the legation was kept busy with looking after the welfare of the newly arrived political refugees coming mainly from Displaced Persons camps in Germany. They were able to issue passports which continued to be recognised by many countries throughout the world. After Balutis's death in 1967, he became Chargé d'Affaires, which position he was to hold until his appointment as Ambassador of the new Lithuanian Government under President Landsbergis.

In spite of lucrative teaching posts offered to him in the United States, Balickas felt it his duty to stay on in his post as the only representative of his country in Britain. Nor did old age ever dim his dedication. On his retirement as Ambassador in 1993 — after 55 years of service to Lithuania in Britain — his wealth of experience continued to be drawn upon in his capacity as honorary counsellor.

Balickas is survived by his wife Stefanija whom he married in 1932 and by a daughter and son. Another daughter predeceased him.

NORMAN HACKFORTH

Norman Hackforth, broadcaster, died on December 14 aged 87. He was born on December 20, 1908.

FOR almost thirty years Norman Hackforth was one of the more unlikely celebrities in British broadcasting. As the "mystery voice" on the popular radio game show *Twenty Questions*, he revealed to listeners the names of the objects whose identity the resident panel then had to guess. The programme made a popular catchphrase of the words "And the next object is..." uttered by Hackforth with vivid theatricality in a voice that blended "the surreptitious and the trustworthy, the sinister and the humane" (so Harold Nicolson said). After 19 years of introducing the objects, he himself was introduced on to the panel, replacing Richard Dimbleby when he became ill in 1965 and going on to serve for almost a decade.

Hackforth enjoyed *Twenty Questions* and the curious fame it brought him, and he used his catchphrase as the title for the autobiography he published in 1975. But he would probably have preferred to be remembered for his work as a musician, in which capacity he provided piano accompaniment for some of the leading popular performers of the day, and played an important — if largely unrecognised — part in Noël Coward's postwar cabaret success. He also served as Allison's bread and Woodbine cigarettes.

Norman Hackforth was born in India, the son of a railway engineer. Sent to England at the age of six, he was brought up by four aunts and did not see his parents again until he was 12. Education at Aldenham School was followed by musical studies, then by a job in a Soho nightclub, playing the piano for £7 a week.

In the years between the wars, Hackforth worked in clubs and in the music halls, appearing with the Whipsnapper Lunatics at the London Pavilion, and accompanying Fanny Ward (the suggestively clad "Flapper Granny") as she thrilled the patrons of the Willesden Empire. He also enjoyed some success as a

Josephine Baker. He went on to accompany Noël Coward on tours to South Africa and the Far East, beginning a collaboration that was to last until the mid-1950s. After the war, he accompanied Beatrice Lillie in cabaret at the reopening of the bombed-out Café de Paris and collaborated with Coward on the shows he gave at the same venue.

Hackforth always insisted that he and Coward had worked together "very amiably" but "the Master" seemed reluctant to acknowledge his debt to his musical collaborator, and remarks he made about him in his diaries, subsequently published, were sometimes uncomplimentary. Hackforth's 1947 revue, *Between Ourselves*, was described by Coward as "awful, a couple of good ideas bungled and a cast of repellent unattractiveness".



It was after the failure of that revue that Hackforth was recruited for *Twenty Questions* by the producer Cleland Film, whom he had met in South Africa with Coward. The programme was to become a hugely popular British institution, and by the time Hackforth was dropped from it in 1975, some 90,000 mysterious objects had been puzzled over by the panel, with well over a million questions ("Animal, vegetable or mineral?") being asked in the quest to identify them all.

Hackforth did not allow the bitterness he felt at being replaced (by Brian Johnston) after almost thirty years on *Twenty Questions* to affect the tone of the cheerful volume of memoirs he published after he left the programme: nor was it evident in the biography he wrote of Kenneth Horne, a former chairman of the panel, in 1976.

His wife Pamela, whom he married in 1949, died last year.

THE RIGHT REV GERALD MOVERLEY

The Right Rev Gerald Moverley, Roman Catholic Bishop of Hallam, 1980-96, died on December 15 aged 74. He was born on April 9, 1922.

A FAITHFUL and unassuming pastoral bishop, Gerald Moverley made national news only once. This happened in 1976 when, as auxiliary bishop of Leeds, he refused to allow Mass to be said in the Wakefield prison cell of the IRA hunger-striker, Frank Stagg.

Stagg, who died ten days later, was by then too weak to make his way to the prison chapel and the bishop was, therefore, depriving him of the sacrament. But Moverley did so deliberately, taking the view that the prisoner was responsible for his own condition and, anyway, that it was morally wrong to bring pressure to bear on the authorities by such methods.

It says something for the generally robust line adopted by the Vatican towards the Provisional IRA that only four years later Moverley should have been appointed to a diocese of his own — the newly created one of Hallam, based on Sheffield and covering south Yorkshire, parts of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. He remained the Roman Catholic Bishop of Hallam until illness forced his retirement earlier this year, the Pope accepting his resignation only last July.

Gerald Moverley was a Yorkshireman by birth, being born in Bradford, the eldest of five children. He was educated at various local Catholic schools, ending up at St Bede's Grammar School, Bradford, where he went to test his vocation and train for the priesthood at Ushaw College, Durham. He was ordained in 1946 and seems to have been



instantly spotted as a high-flyer, being recruited at once as private secretary to the Bishop of Leeds, Henry John Poskitt, by whom he had been ordained.

There then followed three years at the Angelicum University in Rome, where he took

a doctorate in Canon Law. This enabled him to become Chancellor (or chief legal official) of the Leeds diocese in 1957, even though at the time he had never run a parish. His first post as a parish priest was at St Brigid's, Churchwell, to which he was appointed in 1960, and it also proved to be his last. His talents had long been recognised and it came as no surprise when he was named auxiliary bishop of Leeds in 1968.

He spent 12 years in Leeds as assistant to Bishop Gordon Wheeler (like his more celebrated contemporary, Bishop Christopher Butler, a Catholic convert from Anglicanism) and during that time won himself a respected place in the life of the city. He was not, however, fully stretched and his appointment to his own diocese did not come before time. Hallam certainly presented him with a challenge

and he lived through some tough times there — including the bitterness of the miners' strike of 1984-85 and the 1989 Hillsborough football tragedy. But he soon established himself in the life of what had come to feel almost an embattled community and his quiet, reflective approach won him many friends (few of whom had much idea of the intellectual distinction on which it was based).

Outside his diocese he found time to be vice-president of the Church's Commission on Justice and Peace and president of the Canon Law Society, as well as serving as consultant for the revision of *The Code of Canon Law* in 1983. Yet perhaps the outside appointment that gave him greatest pleasure was his comparatively humble membership of the Council of Sheffield University, on which he served from 1985 until his death.

Weekend anniversaries

TODAY
BIRTHS: Mathurin Régnier, poet, Chazelles, France, 1573; Jean Racine, dramatist, La Ferté-Milon, 1639; Leopold von Ranke, historian, Wiehe, Germany, 1795; Robert Moffat, missionary, Ormiston, East Lothian, 1795; Sir Joseph Whitworth, Bt, mechanical engineer, Stockport, 1803; Benjamin Disraeli, 1st Earl of Beaconsfield, Prime Minister 1868 and 1874-80, London, 1804; Archibald Campbell Tait, Archbishop of Canterbury 1869-82, Edinburgh, 1811; Joseph Stalin, Soviet leader, Gori, Georgia, 1879; Dame Rebecca West, novelist and critic, London, 1892.
DEATHS: Giovanni Boccaccio, writer, Certaldo, Italy, 1375; Catherine of Braganza, Queen consort of Charles II, 1680.

Lisbon, 1705; James Parkinson, physician, London, 1824; F. Scott Fitzgerald, novelist, Hollywood, 1940; George Patton, American general of the Second World War, Heidelberg, Germany, 1945; Gladys Ripley, contralto, Chichester, 1955; Lewis Terman, psychologist, Palo Alto, California, 1956; Eric Coates, composer, London, 1957; Sir John (Jack) Hobbs, cricketer, Hove, 1963. The Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, 1620.

Robert Liston used an anaesthetic (ether) for the first time in a British operation, University College Hospital, London, 1846.
A Pan American jumbo jet blew up and crashed on the Scottish border town of Lockerbie killing 270 people, 1988.

TOMORROW
BIRTHS: Karl Abel, composer, Cöthen, Germany, 1725; John Crome, landscape painter, Norwich, 1768; Jean Henri Fabre, naturalist, St-Léons, France, 1823; Giacomo Puccini, composer, Lucca, Italy, 1858; Edwin Arlington Robinson, poet, Head Tide, Maine, 1869; Edgar Varèse, composer, Paris, 1883.
DEATHS: Doc de Sully, soldier and statesman, Villebon, France, 1641; William Hyde Wollaston, physician, London, 1828; George Eliot, novelist, London, 1880; Dwight Moody, evangelist, Northfield, Massachusetts, 1899; Baron Richard von Krafft-Ebing, neuro-psychiatrist, Graz, 1902; Nathaniel West, novelist, El Centro, California, 1940; Beatrix Potter, children's writer, Sawrey, Lancashire, 1943.

Harry Langdon, silent film star, California, 1944.

Alfred Dreyfus, a French army officer, was imprisoned on Devil's Island on a charge of espionage, later proved false, 1894.

Wilhelm Röntgen made the first radiograph or x-ray of his wife's hand, 1895.

The 70mph speed limit was introduced in Britain, 1965.

Latest wills

Bessie Compton, of Haslingden, Rossendale, Lancashire, left estate valued at £822,744 net.
The late £5,000 to Church of Emmanuel Holcombe, £500 to Parish of Emmanuel Holcombe to be spent in connection with Canon Lewis Hall, British Red Cross, £250 to North West Riding Association for the Handicapped, £200 to Manchester and District Home for Lost Dogs.

"MADAME POMPADOUR"

MISS EVELYN LAYE'S SUCCESS.

Musical comedy seems temporarily to have reverted from the hysterical to the historical. A little while ago we had a musical piece woven around the life and loves of the Empress Catherine. At Daly's Theatre last night we had another, dealing with the career of Mme. Pompadour. The former dealt with its heroine in so kindly a way that it might well have been called *The Whiteness of Catherine*, but there was no whitewashing last night.

We were shown a Pompadour who was a distinctly naughty young lady, but Miss Evelyn Laye, who played the part, while revealing in its naughtiness managed to suggest not only the charm which is essential to the success of the perfect "vampire," but the cleverness which is just as essential for her occasional extrication from the deep waters into which her proclivities led her. Essentially she had to reveal a little sentiment of domestic kind, which struck the first jarring note in the portrayal of the character. We are sure that Pompadour would never have given up a potential lover just because he was her sister's husband, and this is what she was made to do last night.

Miss Laye certainly made the most of a

ON THIS DAY

December 21, 1923

Evelyn Laye, who died this year at the age of 95, was on the London stage by the time she was 16 and for many years was the darling of the theatregoers appearing in such musical shows as *The Shop Girl*, *Lilac Time* and *The New Moon*.

great chance. Her singing of a king and occasionally difficult part was always admirable, and her acting, with the exception of a rather irritating giggle, was consistently good. She did really suggest the beautiful, brilliant, and unscrupulous favourite who made such use of her talents, and it was an unexpected pleasure to have the leading character in a musical piece one which, even after being "put to music," did not seem to lose any of its human qualities. Madame Pompadour is certainly put to many trials, for, when travelling incognito (for no very good purpose, it is to be suggested), she first

hears the frank opinion of the proletariat about her character, and then falls in love with an amorous young gentleman whom she enrols in her bodyguard of soldiers, in order that he may always be near her. This is the man whom she afterwards renounces because he is her sister's husband, and before he is renounced he causes a great deal of trouble in the breast of King Louis and others at court. Mr. Derek Oldham makes a manly and sympathetic figure of the lover. He, too, has many songs to sing, and sings them excellently. Mr. Bertram Wallis as the King is a thought too dignified for that vacillating monarch, but vacillates convincingly enough, in spite of that. Mr. Huntley Wright manages to extract a great deal of humour out of the part of a kind of village "Gringoire," who insults Pompadour only to benefit by her favours, and Mr. Leonard Mackay is sufficiently "heavy" as one of those foolish chiefs of police who make the lot of the hero on the stage such a pleasing one. Mr. Leo Fall's music is always tuneful and occasionally more than that, and the "book" is well rendered into English by Mr. Frederick Lonsdale and Mr. Harry Graham.

The piece had an enthusiastic reception, and the audience obtained its way and prevailed on Miss Laye to say a few words.

INSIDE
SECTION
2
TODAY



EXECUTIVE VOICE
Why an independent
oil sector remains
important to Britain
PAGE 22

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday

WORKING WEEK
Smythson's far
from stationary
stationer
PAGE 23



SPORT
Why Shilton is
still saving
for his old age
PAGES 33-40

**THE HIDDEN
ASSETS OF
THE STOCK
EXCHANGE**
PAGE 23

BUSINESS EDITOR Lindsay Cook

SATURDAY DECEMBER 21 1996



Many happy returns: Tony Rados, left, finance director of Amtico, and John Harris, chief executive, yesterday celebrating the flooring company's first year as a management buyout and operating profits up 75 per cent and sales up 18 per cent. Staff numbers have increased by 9 per cent, to 440

Bid deadline extended in battle for Northern

BY CHRISTINE BUCKLEY
INDUSTRIAL
CORRESPONDENT

THE FATE of Northern Electric hung in the balance last night after an 11th-hour extension of the announcement of acceptances for CE Electric's hostile bid.

The delayed conclusion to the hard-fought and often controversial £782 million bid battle underlined the closeness of the struggle. Right up to the deadline for acceptances at 1pm, it had been clear that investors were torn over the value of CE Electric's bid.

Advisers blamed some of the delay on glitches in Crest, the paperless share-trading

system which is dealing with its first bid. Counting by Royal Bank of Scotland, the registrars, was going on late into the night with a cut-off point set for midnight. The Take-over Panel approved the delay.

While acceptances would have drifted in throughout the offer period the institutional investors would have waited until the last moment in case a white knight bidder appeared.

On Northern's side in one of the toughest battles in recent takeover history has been the public support of three major institutions — Frudential, the largest shareholder, who declared that the bid undervalued Northern, Foreign & Colonial and M & G.

On top of that Northern is thought to have been able to rely on substantial support from small shareholders, who own about 17 per cent of the company. Northern Electric's small shareholder group endorsed the rejection of the 650p-a-share offer and objected to CE Electric's tactic of ringing individual shareholders at home.

Northern first rebuffed CE Electric last month, although the two sides had held talks about takeover. The regional electricity company, one of the last five independents, complained that a first offer of 630p a share was too low and said it had been willing to enter full negotiations at the £7

a share mark. CE Electric, the US grouping led by CalEnergy, increased its offer saying that it had kept an amount in reserve to win over Northern's board.

Doubts about a referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission were also overcome when CalEnergy, which is junk-rated for investment in the US, was able to offer sufficient assurances to the regulator to secure his blessing for the bid.

CE Electric's swoop on Northern is part of a wave of interest in UK electricity companies by US utilities. Two of the four other independents have agreed US bids and three other regional electricity busi-

nesses have been bought by US companies.

It is the second time Northern has faced a hostile bid. Last year it mounted a £550 million defence against Trafalgar House (since bought by Kvaerner). Northern's defence then was a bumper shareholder giveaway, which came just weeks after the regulator had delivered a pricing review intended to clamp down on electricity prices.

Northern's defence this time revolved around a 17 per cent jump in the dividend for 1998, reductions in gearing and likely joint ventures. It has also increased dividends.

Tempos, page 24

Morgan Grenfell moves to end trust scandal

BY ROBERT MILLER
BANKING CORRESPONDENT

MORGAN GRENFELL, the troubled fund manager, yesterday finally unveiled its £200 million-plus compensation package for more than 90,000 investors in three of its European funds.

After detailed and complex negotiations with external accountants, legal counsel and Imro, the watchdog for fund managers, Morgan Grenfell said it had been agreed that "anyone who was invested in the funds at any time between August 1, 1995 and September 5, 1996 will be considered for compensation, whether or not they continue to hold those investments". Investors will receive the compensation by the end of next April.

Dealings in Morgan Grenfell's European Growth and European Capital Growth funds were suspended on September 2 after irregularities were found in the trusts' portfolios. Many of the investments held were in highly illiquid and unquoted shares in breach of City rules.

Deutsche Bank, Morgan Grenfell's parent, purchased £180 million of these securities as a first step to clearing up one of the biggest scandals to hit the unit trust industry.

At the time of the suspension some £1.4 billion was invested in the three funds but since dealings resumed on September 5 some £400 million has been withdrawn.

Peter Young, the fund manager of two of the trusts, was dismissed for "gross misconduct" and is the subject of a continuing Serious Fraud Office investigation.

The August 1995 start date for the compensation was fixed because that is when Morgan Grenfell believed that Mr Young began to establish a complicated web of Luxembourg companies.

Cash or units, page 25
Anne Ashworth, page 27

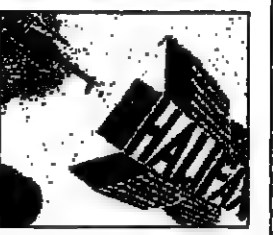
WEEKEND MONEY



27
Anne Ashworth on
Morgan Grenfell
and the watchdog

BUILDING SOCIETIES

25
News in the
new year of
Halifax payouts



26
The true cost
of an investment
guarantee

PENSIONS

27
Questions you
should ask about
your pension



BORROWING



28
How to shrink
your Christmas
credit card debt

BUSINESS TODAY

FTSE 100	4077.8 (+28.3)
Yield	3.91%
FTSE All share	1883.71 (+13.25)
Nickel	10802.40 (+18.75)
New York	
Dow Jones	6488.25 (+14.01)
S&P Composite	745.52 (+4.58)

3-mth Interbank	6.75% (5.75%)
3-mth Long bill	6.75% (5.75%)
3-mth Treasury	6.75% (5.75%)

New York	
S. 100	1,557.28 (1,564.0)
London	
DM	1,551.00 (1,558.2)
FF	1,528.10 (1,535.0)
SP	1,523.00 (1,530.0)
Yen	114.20 (114.05)
S Index	98.4 (98.5)

Tokyo close Yen	114.20
Brent 15-day (Mar)	\$23.10 (\$23.50)
London close	\$388.35 (\$389.05)

Gas cuts	
Fears increased yesterday of cuts in industrial gas supplies this winter. Page 22	

Equities capture the festive spirit

BY MICHAEL CLARK, STOCK MARKET CORRESPONDENT

CHRISTMAS came early for investors on the London stock market as share prices soared to their highest levels yet.

The FTSE 100 index of leading shares reached 4,100 for the first time before seeing earlier gains halved. Even so, it ended 26.3 up at a record closing high of 4,077.6, a rise on the week of 105 points.

It followed a breathtaking performance overnight on Wall Street where the Dow Jones industrial average soared 136 points, its biggest one-day rise for nine years. In early trading last night, Wall Street kept up the pace with a rise of 75 points before the Dow fell back to reduce the lead to 31.1 at 6,504.78.

The London market this week has been fuelled by a series of

corporate bids, including an agreed offer for London Electricity, and some year-end window dressing by the big City institutions who have been squaring up their book positions. This has led to stock shortages.

Brokers have reported some heavy turnover in shares this week although much of it has been conducted between traders, presenting a slightly false view of events. A total of 944 million shares had changed by the close of business last night.

The bond market experienced a further flattening of the yield curve as investors continued switching out of shorter-dated coupons. Prices at the longer end rose 1/4 on average.

Stock market, page 24

Newman Tonks sells £27m stake

BY OLIVER AUGUST

NEWMAN TONKS, the engineering company, yesterday strengthened its defence against a hostile bid from FKI by selling its 33 per cent stake in a Spanish security products company for £27 million.

Newman's stake plus a majority family stake in Tesa, based in Irón, northeast Spain, were bought by Williams, the fire protection products manufacturer, for a total of £100 million. FKI had launched a £200 million offer for Newman Tonks last Tuesday after criticising the Newman management for lack of focus and underperformance.

Geoff Gahm, Newman chief executive, said: "We are deploying financial resources away from non-core areas."

Name turns to the courts for payment

BY JON ASHWORTH

LLOYD'S of London apologised again yesterday for setbacks to its settlement plan, as a name turned to the courts in an attempt to force payment of funds. The unidentified name is suing Lloyd's for £33,428, in what is seen as a test case.

The plaintiff is one of 12,000 "accepting" names owed money under the Lloyd's settlement. More than 8,400 have been paid — 210 cheques worth £9 million were dispatched yesterday — but progress has been frustratingly slow. Lloyd's has admitted that the payments will continue well beyond the original mid-December deadline.

Michael Freeman, the lawyer acting in the case, speaks for 240 accepting names, none

of whom has been paid. One couple is owed £500,000. Mr Freeman said: "They are not getting their cheques."

Lloyd's said there was always a risk that payments would slip into 1997, and described the court action as "completely irrational". John Stace, deputy chairman, said: "There is nothing sinister. All the money is there."

Names are due interest on outstanding funds. A separate test case seeking judgments against "non-accepting" names was adjourned yesterday until mid-January.

Corporate capital will dominate Lloyd's within two years, says a survey by Whittingdale, the fund management group. Respondents described names as a dying breed.

Store chiefs leave revamped Lloyds TSB

BY ROBERT MILLER
BANKING CORRESPONDENT

THE battle for financial services supremacy in the high street yesterday led to wide-sweeping boardroom changes at Lloyds TSB Group in an attempt to avoid growing conflicts of interest.

The banking group announced that Sir Richard Greenbury, chairman of Marks & Spencer, who became a bank director in 1992, and John Gilder-sleeve, a Tesco director, who linked-up with Lloyds Bank in 1994, are to stand down in April.

Lloyds TSB said that the two senior directors had decided that "it would be appropriate for them to leave the board, as both Marks & Spencer and Tesco

have increased their involvement in the provision of financial services".

Marks & Spencer promotes its own plastic card as well as branded unit trusts, loans and personal pensions, and the decision by Sir Richard to sever his Lloyds TSB link may herald a further move by M&S into personal financial services. Tesco offers its customers a Clubcard payment card in conjunction with NatWest, and more developments are expected in this field.

The boardroom changes at Lloyds TSB precede Peter Ellwood taking the helm as group chief executive in February, when he is to succeed Sir Brian Pitman, who will become the bank's chairman, in place of Sir Robin Ibb who is retiring.

Other appointments include the

elevation of Andrew Longhurst, chief executive of Cheltenham & Gloucester, the former building society and now the banking group's residential mortgage arm, who becomes group director of customer finance. Mr Longhurst will also become chairman of C&G in place of John Bays, who will become deputy chairman.

Kent Atkinson is to become the group finance director and Michael Fairley will be the group director of central services, with responsibility for the retail networks of Lloyds and TSB as integration continues.

Stephen Maran will take charge of savings and investments at board level, as well as the integration of Lloyds Abbey Life into the rapidly expanding banking group.



Greenbury: standing down at bank

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YES or NO (please circle) (CV 21/12/96)

Why Britain still needs an independent oil sector

Britain is unique in Europe in having established a substantial, independent exploration and production sector (E & P). Experience has amply demonstrated that the independents have made, and continue to make, a vital contribution to the UK economy, and help to sustain the power and effectiveness of the UK oil and gas industry.

Our independent E & P companies are at the heart of a liberalised energy market and provide secure and diverse supplies at competitive prices. They deserve a place in the UK energy market because they provide cost-effective and imaginative ways of exploring and exploiting our North Sea assets, as well as ensuring continuing interest from the financial sector in its continued development.

The professionalism and technological know-how of these dynamic British businesses are much sought after around the world and, quite apart from the

wealth they create for shareholders, their export of skills is of real benefit to the UK economy.

In the mid 1980s, Brindex (the Association of British Independent Oil Exploration Companies), the trade body of UK independents of which I was chairman, boasted a membership of more than 50 companies. After last year's disappearance of Goval and Aran, the roll call now stands at just 11 companies. As this year ends, another of that number — the company where I have spent the past 23 years — finds itself in the sights of a predator seeking its valuable assets.

While the number of independents has fallen, their status has increased substantially. Collectively we now enjoy a market capitalisation of more than £7.5 billion and currently employ around 3,000 people in our North Sea and worldwide activities. We operate in 38 countries worldwide, we have combined reserves of more than one billion barrels of oil and five-and-a-half trillion

cubic feet of gas. The UK independents offer investors a diversity of companies to invest in, ranging from those engaged in high-risk exploration to those who concentrate on lower-risk exploitation.

The professionalism and sophistication developed within the British independents continues to lead to ever greater successes, and not just through speculative activity but by developing clear strategies that focus on production development, low-cost development and leading edge infrastructure technology, that in turn add value for investors.

What should be remembered is that the history of oil and gas discoveries and developments in the North Sea is one in which the independents have made a major contribution. Through numerous joint venture partnerships, a symbiotic relationship has grown between the majors and both larger and smaller independents; each has its role but they interact with positive results in operational, technical and commercial spheres.

EXECUTIVE VOICE



Malcolm Gourlay

Going back to the early history of North Sea oil developments, the initial four rounds of UK offshore licence awards went principally to the major oil companies. But from the fifth round onwards, the independent sector has gained a far greater share of the licences being awarded, tapping new sources of finance in the form of risk capital and debt finance and creating numerous joint ventures

and partnerships with the major international players.

Since the mid-1970s, the independent sector has made a substantial and growing contribution in exploration and development and innovative financing. Many of the skills developed within this sector have a particular relevance to a maturing hydrocarbon province such as the North Sea and, therefore, with suitable encouragement, the remaining independents should be playing an even greater role in the future of the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS).

The independent companies have become skilled at improving their competitive positions by finding lower-cost solutions for future operations and developments that will be vital as the North Sea matures. In our own case, that has meant the use of low-cost reusable platforms on our offshore Dutch gasfields and the introduction of a purpose-built floating production vessel in the fast-track development of the UKCS Gryphon Field. It is, in-

deed, ironic to note that the approach to my company, Clyde, came just 48 hours after we announced an agreement with BP and BHP that gave us our first operated development in the UKCS. Such deals are typical of the ways in which efficient independents can — and should — be acquiring acreage that would be deemed peripheral or marginal by the multinationals and making those assets perform.

Both the challenge and the opportunity for the independent sector is to ensure that the UK's offshore oil and gas assets continue to be exploited by their true potential. We need to win more access, for example, to the larger amounts of acreage that remain under-explored and under-exploited. As a group of UK independents we strongly support the Department of Trade & Industry in its efforts to find more effective ways of releasing such acreage.

Over the past 25 years, British independent E & P companies have developed the management

skills to bring new exploration and exploitation ideas to bear and to develop, on a cost-effective basis, smaller oil and gasfields on long-held acreage, which may not be a priority for the giants of our industry.

The British independents compete successfully on the world stage in international exploration and production ventures. We ensure that the UK economy gets full benefit from the considerable remaining potential of the North Sea and so provide a stable platform (no pun intended) for our continuing growth both at home and overseas.

Malcolm Gourlay is chairman of Clyde Petroleum, one of the UK's leading independent exploration and production companies. He is also a past chairman of Brindex, the Association of British Independent Oil Exploration Companies, and was recently elected honorary treasurer of UKOIA, the UK Offshore Operators' Association.

Vardey to resign at exchange

By Robert Miller

GILES VARDEY, a senior director of the London Stock Exchange, yesterday announced his resignation publicly, so permitting his entry into talks with prospective market employers.

Mr Vardey, who is 40, has been at the Stock Exchange for four years as director of markets development and marketing. At one stage earlier this year, City watchers had him listed as an outside bet for the chief executive's post, which went to Gavin Casey, the former Smith New Court and then Merrill Lynch executive.

It was no secret in the market that Mr Vardey would have liked to have won the top job, but it is understood that he never formally submitted an application. Mr Vardey will stay in his present post until the end of March, but yesterday's announcement frees him to talk to other Stock Exchange member firms without giving rise to any potential conflict of interest.

John Kemp-Welch, the chairman of the exchange, said: "During the last four years, Giles Vardey has made a valuable contribution to many areas of the work of the exchange."

Ofgas warns industrial users of supply cuts

By Christine Buckley, Industrial Correspondent

FEARS increased yesterday of cuts in industrial gas supplies this winter when the regulator gave warning of significant interruptions and of the potential for gas prices in the wholesale market to rocket.

The alert follows a similar warning from Transco, British Gas's pipelines division, that large gas users with interruptible contracts were likely to see supplies cut.

The impact of large cuts in industrial gas supplies must now be balanced by shippers on a daily basis under the network code designed to ensure competition works effectively. Ofgas has asked Transco to consider whether changes to the code are needed. So far there have been 108 modifications to the code introduced in March and further changes are planned.

Ofgas complained of a lack of communication last winter when Transco implemented some interruptions. The company said that it had already addressed such problems and was seeking closer liaison with gas shippers and customers.

wholesale gas market — the flexibility mechanism — "may be very high".

Large industrial users that take interruptible contracts because they offer cheaper fuel often leave themselves without back-up supplies. Controversially, a large number of hospitals use such contracts.

Concern over gas supply security has been triggered because of increased demand and also because of the way in which gas supplies must now be balanced by shippers on a daily basis under the network code designed to ensure competition works effectively.

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Profit hike: Marshall Smalley, right, managing director of Meconic, the world's largest producer of legal opiates, and Jim Cook, finance director, who gave warning yesterday that a poor poppy harvest was hitting margins on its opiate-based products. Its contract manufacture business is also expected to show a more modest rate of growth, although overall year-on-year progress should be better.

Fortis ties up £858m MeesPierson deal

FORTIS, the Dutch-Belgian insurance, banking and investment group, yesterday became the world's 14th largest asset manager after completing the £858 million purchase of MeesPierson from ABN Amro, the Dutch banking combine. The MeesPierson deal, one of the largest acquisitions in Dutch history, will give Fortis total assets under management of £75 billion. To finance the acquisition of MeesPierson, which specialises in asset management and private banking, Fortis will increase its net equity, reallocate existing available funds and employ other financing instruments.

Fortis said of the deal: "The acquisition is a perfect fit in the group's strategy, and is also fully in line with its financial and acquisition criteria. MeesPierson will provide Fortis with both critical mass in asset management and new, complementary activities in attractive markets, including private banking and corporate banking. The newly enlarged bank, which will be the fourth largest in The Netherlands, continued: "The addition of this new component to the group will create even more opportunities for Fortis companies, starting with those in The Netherlands."

Sunderland popular

EAGER investors have made sure that the £42 million flotation of Sunderland, the Premiership football club, is 2.7 times oversubscribed. This means that a healthy premium is expected when the shares start trading on Christmas Eve and bodes well for the impending flotation of near neighbours Newcastle United, which said it will go for a £160 million flotation in the new year. Meanwhile West Bromwich Albion, the Nationwide Division One club, has confirmed it is to take a listing on AIM. No new money is being raised.

Forminster advances

FORMINSTER, the clothing manufacturer that bought Kookai, the up-market fashion chain, in August, has reported a rise in interim pre-tax profits to £768,000 in the half year to October 31, from £512,000 in the same period last year. Turnover was down to £10.8 million, from £11.6 million. Earnings per share were up to 4.07p, from 2.36p. There will be an interim dividend of 1.22p per ordinary share, up from 1.17p. The dividend will be payable on February 17.

Lancashire lifts profit

LANCASHIRE ENTERPRISES, the economic development specialists, yesterday reported a 7.5 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £2.36 million (£2.66 million) for the year ending October 31. Turnover was up from £18.37 million to £20.21 million and basic earnings per share were up 1.6 per cent to 11.1p. The dividend per share is 4.4p (4p), payable on April 30. This year saw the retirement as managing director of Michael Hynes, who has led the company since it became a plc in 1992. The shares were unchanged at 150p.

UK Estate urges rebuff

UK ESTATE, the property group, yesterday urged shareholders to reject a hostile all-paper takeover bid by its rival, Ashquay. David Gradel, chairman, said Ashquay's falling share price had lowered the value of its offer to only 28.1p. "Ashquay's high gearing, soaring debts and limited cash resources make it difficult to believe that this is a credible basis for making their offers," he said. Ashquay has received around 37.8 per cent of UK Estate's ordinary shares and 16.6 per cent of preference, and has extended its offer until January 9.

Claremont cautious

CLAREMONT GARMENTS, a clothing supplier to Marks & Spencer, said yesterday that sales in the immediate run-up to Christmas have been below expectations and that its second-half profit will be lower than last year. But it also said that pressures on margins in the clothing industry are easing after a difficult 18 months. The company, which announced two months ago that it was to close a factory in Scotland, said £7 million restructuring costs will be taken as an exceptional item in this year's accounts. The shares slid to 166½p.

Symonds paying £4m for Calne Group

By Oliver August

SYMONDS, the engineering group, is to buy Calne Group, the electronics company, for £4 million.

To fund the acquisition and to strengthen its capital base, Symonds is planning a £9.6 million placing and open offer.

The acquisition is said to enhance Symonds's test, design, manufacturing and assembly capabilities and allow the group to focus on the industrial controls and transportation sectors.

Rod Ackrill, the chairman of Symonds, said: "Calne will broaden and enhance the

group's capability within the electronics industry and enable it to continue to make satisfactory progress."

An extraordinary meeting to gain shareholder approval for the acquisition has been called for January 16.

The arrival of a new management team under Mr Ackrill in 1993 led to a restructuring of Symonds and a change of emphasis from engineering to electronics.

In the same period, the market capitalisation of the group has increased from £2 million to more than £29 million.

AEA to buy BR Research

AEA TECHNOLOGY, the recently privatised science and engineering services group, is poised to buy British Rail Research for £10.8 million (Chris Ayres writes).

The acquisition of BR Research, which provides consultancy, research, and engineering services, will allow AEA to satisfy overseas ambitions in the transport industry.

BR Research, which employs about 260 people, reported pre-tax profits of £1.4 million on a turnover of £17.3 million in the year ending March 31. Net assets were £2.9 million. AEA's pre-tax operating profits were £6.4 million on a turnover of £112 million for the half year ending September 30.

Blind climber wins 'Oscar'

By Morag Preston

A BLIND telephonist who climbed Mont Blanc, Western Europe's highest peak, to raise money for charity and an internal audit manager who was the inspiration for raising funds for a special needs school were among the winners yesterday at NatWest's Group Chief Executive Awards ceremony.

Set up four years ago, the group-wide award scheme has helped to raise hundreds of thousands of pounds for local charities. The seven winners who included Jane Nunn, an internal audit manager, received £2,000 each for their chosen charity, while the 12 finalists took £1,000 home to their voluntary organisations.

All were selected from around 270 entrants who put themselves forward for the fundraising awards that the bank refers to as its "Oscars".

Derek Wanless, chief executive at NatWest, said: "It is about spreading good practice." His intention is to match the commitment of his employees.

He has set his sights on climbing another mountain, this time in Russia, next year. Among the judges were Rabbi Julia Neuberger, the social communicator and writer, Jill Pitkeathley, director of the National Cerebral Association and Ian Bruce, director of the Royal National Institute for the Blind.



Derek Wanless with Jane Nunn and Donald Planner

TOURIST RATES

Bank	Rate	Bank	Rate
Australia S	9.18	Spain S	16.00
Austria S	13.17	Switzerland S	2.02
Belgium F	98.19	Sweden S	11.75
Canada C	2.378	Switzerland F	2.210
Cyprus C	0.216	Switzerland S	0.701
Denmark K	10.48	Switzerland S	0.88
France F	6.56	Switzerland S	0.88
Germany D	2.74	Switzerland S	0.88
Greece D	4.88	Switzerland S	0.88
Hong Kong S	13.46	Switzerland S	0.88
Ireland P	1.86	Switzerland S	0.88
Italy Lira	2653	Switzerland S	0.88
Japan Yen	204.00	Switzerland S	0.88
Malta M	0.540	Switzerland S	0.88
Netherlands Gld	3.061	Switzerland S	0.88
New Zealand S	2.30	Switzerland S	0.88
Norway Kr	11.29	Switzerland S	0.88
Portugal Esc	272.00	Switzerland S	0.88
S Africa R	8.34	Switzerland S	0.88
Spain Pta	225.00	Switzerland S	0.88
Sweden Kr	12.04	Switzerland S	0.88
Switzerland F	2.25	Switzerland S	0.88
Turkey Lira	164000	Switzerland S	0.88
USA \$	1.760	Switzerland S	0.88

THE SUNDAY TIMES

The winners and losers of 1996

Which businessman made the most money in the last 12 months? Who saw the biggest dent in their fortune? Which companies produced the best and worst performances?

Tomorrow The Sunday Times reveals the financial winners and losers of 1996

A WORKING WEEK FOR: Sarah Elton

Smythson's far from stationary stationer

Sarah Cunningham meets a woman who has brought growth without offending the old guard

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday

AS managing director of Smythson, Sarah Elton is in the midst of the busiest weeks of her year. For the traditional royal-warrant-holding stationer, the last few days before Christmas disappear in a blur of Christmas shoppers and party invitation printing.

The parties are not always the standard cocktail bash. The company has produced invitations for a cat's party, and even made hand-engraved visiting cards for dogs. For those seeking gift inspiration there are more traditional goods like leather-bound books for registering fishing and hunting catches, as well as diaries, collar books, clocks, photo albums and fine leather wallets, purses and hand bags.

Elton's working life is busy at the best of times. The company, part of the John Menzies group, has expanded rapidly since she took over as managing director three years ago. Not only have sales climbed — a 20 per cent increase last year —

but the company has also moved from the small Bond Street shop it occupied since its establishment in 1887, to a much larger store down the road. Moreover, Elton has added a second Smythson store in Sloane Street, as well as a franchise in Harvey Nichols and another in Heathrow's Terminal 4. The next is likely to be abroad, in New York or the Far East.

At 33 years old, the tall, blonde and charming Elton is very young for her job, and her achievements are all the more remarkable if you take into account that she has had two lots of maternity leave since she took over. She now has two daughters, Harriet, two, and Elizabeth, six months.

When she joined the company five years ago she was amazed how narrow the customer base was. "I felt like Smythson was the world's best kept secret," she says. Her biggest success, in her view, has been bringing in new

customers without losing the original base, which although declining, was very loyal and needed to be reassured.

"We've always had quite a large smattering of film stars and so on as customers, but in England we have had a lot of county people," she said. "We have to be discreet, handling invitations for very smart weddings and parties and so on. Our customers like the fact that they can trust us."

She is discreet about the identity of Smythson's customers, but drops hints: "Quite new big stars in the States come to us almost immediately. It is quite extraordinary. There is very strong word of mouth worldwide. There are also a lot of the big fashion names from Bond Street."

Most of the crowned heads of Europe, as well as our own Royals, are customers. Others reputed to use the shop include Lauren Bacall, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Nicholson, Frank Sinatra and Giorgio Armani.

Elton's first move away from the traditional base was to

open the Harvey Nichols franchise: "That was an immediate success, and obviously a very different customer." Goods were carefully selected to suit the more

fashion-conscious Harvey Nick's shopper. "The business was a little bit old-fashioned and we worked quite hard to make it more contemporary," she says diplomatically.

For someone with so many demands to meet, Elton has a remarkable breeziness. Her ambition, she says, comes from an inability to cope with boredom. The word "smart" peppers her conversation, and providing smart goods for smart people and smart occasions is something she enjoys enormously.

She is utterly committed to the world of retailing. Her first experience came through working in shops on Saturdays when at school. After Exeter University, where she read history, she joined the John Lewis management training scheme, turning down possible jobs at Harrods and Aspreys because she was unimpressed at their interviews.

After five years working in a variety of departments at John Lewis, she moved to Retail



Having helped Smythson to boost its profile, sales and number of outlets in the UK, Sarah Elton is now looking to expand overseas, probably in New York or the Far East

Solutions, a retail management consultancy. This showed her the other side of retailing: "It taught me a lot about how important the visual aspects of the job are — patterns, design, layout. These things can't be bolted on; I think you need a consistent vision about what you're doing."

Expanding Smythson without losing cachet is a difficult trick, she admits. "We are approached all the time with ideas, but we do have a contract with our customers to keep ourselves a little bit special and different."

The high production standards make it difficult to make dramatic increases in output, but she adds: "Having said that, we are looking overseas as the next step." New York or the Far East are likely to see the

next branch of Smythson, but not too soon. "The next step will be crucial for us, we're not going to rush it. One thing I think I have given to the company is confidence, and at the end of the day, I feel we know best."

Smythson is very small compared with some French and Italian luxury goods companies, like LVMH and Gucci, and it is not racing for the big time, Elton says. "With all luxury goods, the difficulty is reaching a wider market but retaining control."

What Smythson does have, which sets it apart from continental luxury goods companies, is a fine tradition of British craftsmanship. "Being British is important to us. We are not too loud. The story about luxury goods in the

Nineties is much more about discerning customers."

"They will not just fall for a logo, they want to know they have bought the best. We're ideally positioned for that because we are the real McCoy — we have all that heritage and history and expertise. We're all content and no flash."

Although Smythson is wholly owned by John Menzies, it

is run as a separate business, which is good news for Elton.

"They trust me, I hope, therefore they give me a lot of freedom," she says. "They don't try to say to me 'we do it this way'."

Juggling work and home has not proven as hard as she had feared. The company has taken the admirable, but all-too-rare step of allowing her to work a four-day week, and she

has a nanny to look after her young daughters when she is not around. Her husband, Graham, who is a director of Pearson Professional, is often away on business, but is extremely supportive of her commitment to her job.

Elton's sense of commitment to Smythson has surprised even her. "I'd always thought I'd give up work when I had children, but you spend

ten years becoming a certain sort of person and it is very difficult to give it up. I get a buzz out of work," she says. It is hard to imagine that Elton's ambitions will not take her up and away from Smythson in the long run, but not before she has introduced more people into the secret world of what she proudly calls "probably the best stationery in the world".

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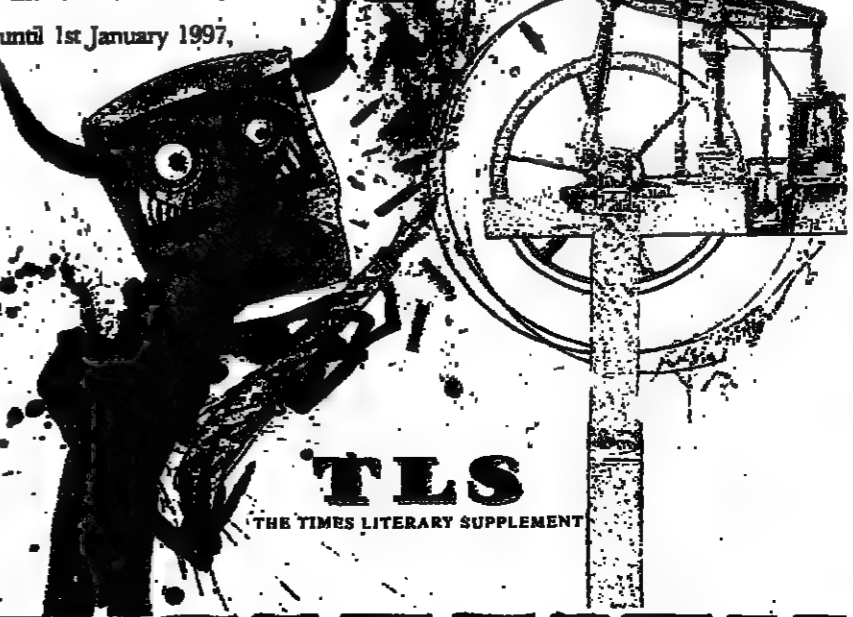
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The secret hoard seen by only a few privileged eyes

Joanna Pitman enjoys a rare glimpse of the Stock Exchange's family silver

The London Stock Exchange has been fortunate over the centuries to have acquired a magnificent and varied collection of valuable decorative assets, most of them presented by other stock exchanges around the world or by brokers or corporate members, grateful for the Exchange's successful handling of their assets during wars and other crises. Many of these generous donations have been in the form of highly elaborate silverware, all valuable as individual items, but as a collection virtually priceless.

These fine pieces, however, have been so well hidden — one might say so effectively forgotten — that no one within this grand old institution seems to know exactly what they are, when they were given, by whom, or indeed where they might be now. This vast array of

decorative silver appears to be hidden from the remit of the in-house public relations team, from the brief of the premises manager, from other members of staff and the public.

The collection includes piles of solid silver salvers, a forest of candelabras, hillocks of rose bowls, loving cups, pottagers, cigar boxes, cigarette boxes, ashtrays, stone-shaded chaises, medals, mustard pots, ink stands, cream jugs and enough sets of solid silver cutlery to cater for most of the population of Denmark. A strong-room, about the size of a couple of tennis courts, is stuffed with this haul of presents, which are reassessed by valuations experts from Hemmells once a decade. In all, there are thought to be "something like

200 pieces" (which does not account for an unknown number of 80-piece cutlery sets and numerous sets of matching platters and bowls).

Apart from the Hemmells men, it is only the occasional waiter who gets to see the collection when sent down to the strong room by the butler to retrieve a few of the more utilitarian items for use during special banquets.

A small number of prize pieces (about 20) are displayed in a cabinet in a dining room on the twenty-third floor. Here we find some of the most elaborately worked silver and silver gilt items imaginable. There is, for example, a huge silver gilt rosewater dish made in Italy in 1600. Twenty-four inches

in diameter and weighing 180 oz, it is decorated in the centre with a figure of Fame with the shield and coronet of the Italian family for whom the work was done. The rim is similarly chased with decorative figures describing events in the life of Andrea Doria, the Genoese admiral of the 16th century. The engraving on the back of the dish reads: "The Governor and Company of the Bank of England to the Chairman and Committee of The Stock Exchange in recognition of close and friendly co-operation during and after the war 1914-1922."

Beside this extraordinary piece sits another, larger, silver rosewater dish, 30 inches in diameter and likewise chased with an elaborate landscape scene and figures. This was presented by 16 firms to the Stock Exchange's sub-committee of the general purposes committee, appointed to deal with the crisis of 1929-1930.

In recent years the flow of gifts has ebbed, the last bumper crop being in 1986 when the Exchange hosted the twenty-fifth anniversary party of the Federation of International Stock Exchanges.

Given the extent and value of the pieces, which range from a Northolt Park Races Toby Cup to a large solid silver grasshopper, it is surely time for an exhibition of the whole lot. Apart from the obvious interest for the public, the Stock Exchange's own staff may learn a thing or two about what resides behind locks and chains beneath their desks.



Clare Allison with some items from the London Stock Exchange's elaborate collection

Shares break records on both sides of the Atlantic

THE record books were again being rewritten last night as share prices continued to ride high on both sides of the Atlantic.

In London, equities soared to their highest levels ever, briefly reaching the 4,000 level, as the pre-Christmas rally gathered pace.

This followed a 136-point leap by the Dow Jones industrial average overnight — its biggest one-day rise for nine years. However, with Wall Street showing signs of running out of steam in early trading yesterday, the FT-SE 100 index also saw earlier gains almost halved. It still finished 26.3 points up at a new closing high of 4,077.6, a rise on the week of 105.2. Once again turnover levels were bolstered by year-end window dressing by institutional investors, with 954 million shares changing hands.

Bid speculation continued to drive General Accident sharply higher. It added a further 10p at 760p, after briefly touching 768p. This stretches the lead on the week to 72p. Once again there was talk about a possible bid from BAT Industries after its talks with Commercial Union, 1p lower at 687p, broke down last month. BAT Industries finished 4p cheaper at 480p.

Dalgety's talks with brokers this week have borne fruit, with the price adding another 7p at 361p.

British Steel slipped 1p to 162p as a large lot of shares went through the market at a discount. A total of 9.98 million were placed at 161p, a discount of 3p to the ruling market price of 164p.

Rank Organisation slipped another 3p to 414p as brokers continued to reflect on Thursday's downbeat trading statement. GKN continued to lose ground in the wake of this week's US court ruling, the shares fell a further 17p to 992p.

Northern Electric firmed 4p to 641p as the deadline for CE Electric's bid of 665 million expired. At the last count, the US power company accounted for 33 per cent of the shares. The remaining regional electricity companies were marked higher. East Midlands, the subject of an offer from Dominion Resources, firmed 1p at 665p, while London, which earlier this week agreed a bid from Entergy, added 2p at 698p. There were also gains for



Selling pressure knocked 3p off Burton shares

Yorkshire Electricity, 12p at 772p. Southern Electric, 5p at 778p. Northern Ireland Electricity, 9p at 379p. National Power, 6p at 478p. PowerGen, 3p at 581p. Scottish Power, 11p at 346p, and Scottish Hydro 11p at 333p.

A positive trading statement lifted English China Clay 14p to 191p, with the group

Arrow Electronics in the US for \$300 million. The disposal is expected to raise a surplus above book value of £70 million.

Claremont Garments dropped 6p to 166p after the company expressed disappointment with the pace of sales in the run-up to Christmas. The group said that sales had failed to match

after the closure of Clothing Barn. Margins continue to suffer. The shares rose 2p to 59p.

The news from Claremont and Gent left two of their biggest customers nursing sizable falls. Next fell 7p to 544p and Marks & Spencer 11p to 472p. Coats Viyella, which issued a profits warning earlier in the week, rallied 1p to 127p.

Elsewhere among the retailers, Burton eased 3p to 15p as a line of 7.3 million shares were placed at 150p.

Castle Mill, another textiles group, was steady at 3p after announcing reduced losses in the first six months of the year. Aquarius Group, the furnishings group, made a positive start in first-time dealings, opening at 172p, against a placing price of 166p. The shares later dipped to 170p before recovering to end at 172p, a premium of 6p.

Over on Oxf, Sardinia International started trading at 10p after a placing at 11p by Griffiths & Lamb, the broker. The group's sound system is used in theme park simulator rides.

The breakdown in bid talks with Panther Securities left Exmoor Dual Investment Trust 1p lower at 12p. It looks like being a merry Christmas for Toy Oadon, which is expected to benefit from booming sales of Buzz Lightyear dolls this year. However, after touching 107p, the shares closed all at 103p.

■ GILT-EDGED: There was a further flattening of the yield curve as the London market took its lead from firmer German bunds to extend this week's gains.

Once again, the best improvements were seen at the longer end, while prices among shorter-dated coupons were held back by persistent interest rate worries.

In futures, the March series of the long gilt put on £1 at 109 1/4 as the total number of contracts completed reached just 22,000.

Treasury 8 per cent put on £1/2 at 102 1/4, while Treasury 8 per cent 2000 was just a tick firmer at 102 1/4.

■ NEW YORK: Shares on Wall Street were mixed at mid-session after a powerful opening drive steadily lost steam during the rest of the morning. The Dow Jones industrial average at midday was up 14.61 points at 6,488.25.

MAJOR INDICES

New York (midday):
Dow Jones 6488.25 (+14.61)
S&P Composite 748.82 (+2.28)

Tokyo:
Nikkei Average 19690.46 (+19.79)
Hang Seng 13131.41 (+204.83)

Amsterdam:
EOE Index 632.71 (+7.18)
AEX 237.58 (+4.21)

Frankfurt:
DAX 2954.45 (+40.70)
Singapore:
Straits 2196.81 (+2.54)

Brussels:
General 1047.54 (+8.83)
CAC-40 2289.53 (+28.03)

Zurich:
SIX Gen 833.80 (+2.83)

London:
FT 100 4077.6 (+136.3)
FTSE 100 4077.6 (+136.3)
FTSE 250 3322.7 (+14.0)
FTSE 100 1988.23 (+52.13)
FT All-Share 1097.71 (+13.88)
FT Non Financials 2074.31 (+13.64)
FT Financials 116.93 (+0.22)
FT Govt 96.31 (+0.28)

US:
S&P 500 748.82 (+2.28)
Dow Jones 6488.25 (+14.61)
NASDAQ 2559.91 (+0.03)
Exchange Index 94.1 (Stable)
Bank of England official rate 4.75%
USDC 1.6094
RPI 153.9 Nov (2.7%) Jan 1997-100
RPI 153.7 Nov (2.5%) Jan 1997-100

RECENT ISSUES

Advanced Power Co 52 ...
Aquarius 172p ...
Archer Dedicated 100 ...
BZW Endowment Fund 35p ...
Calsonic 28p ...
Cell Telecom (LTD) 28p ...
Crown Leisure 81p ...
Dawn TII Dusk 121p ...
Finsbury Int Hedge 61p ...
Fountain Forestry 84p ...
Henderson Tech C 102p ...
Highways Systems 110p ...
Kern River 50p ...
Kier Group 187p ...
Lidren 164p ...
Nescafe 49p ...
Othello Astworth 103p ...
Oxley 102p ...
Oxford Biomedica 89p ...
Parkwood Holdings 79p ...
Pilot Technologies 55p ...
Provent (LTD) 137p ...
SDX Business Sys 170p ...
Scott Highland Hts 102p ...
Simple Cochran 242p ...
Xenova 216p ...
Yemen Group 159p ...

RIGHTS ISSUES

Allied Colloids n/p 12 + 1
Aukett n/p 14 ...
Asian n/p (62) ...
BioCompart n/p 251 + 11p

MAJOR CHANGES

BT 220p (+17p)
Aldi 140p (+11p)
Old English Pub 182p (+11p)
De La Rue 588p (+22p)
Wassell 319p (+15p)
Rite & Nolan 332p (+15p)
Entropia (+52p)
Sage Gp 524p (+18p)

FALLS:
Unilever 177p (-10p)
GKN 992p (-17p)
Barclays 994p (-12p)
GUS 823p (-8p)

Closing Prices Page 32

TEMPUS

Taken to the wire

NORTHERN's battles for independence have been spirited. Its defence against Trafalgar House brought shareholder returns in surprising abundance.

Certainly they were surprising for the electricity regulator, who, only a few weeks earlier, had supposedly delivered a review to clamp down on power prices. Northern's delivery of £550 million of goodies forced the regulator to redo his sums.

Northern's scorched earth defence made its garden look potentially so unattractive that another suitor seemed unlikely. At the height of the takeover sweeps that have gripped the industry, Northern has continually seemed the wallflower.

But then came CE Electric, led by CalEnergy, a company for which high debt levels were not necessarily fearsome. Offering

what it considered a reasonable and affordable price, it weighed in with a bid.

Northern said that the overtures were too cheap. CE Electric upped the price, but Northern fought on, raising its cupboards for fresh delights to serve up to investors.

Admittedly the sweetie store was suffering a little after such an enormous raid to fend off Trafalgar. But Northern still managed a package that lifted the dividend by 17 per cent and promised a yield of 10 per cent.

CalEnergy has mounted its takeover on a ticket of cash now, rather than promises later. Many investors have been torn until the last minute on this offer. The extension of the announcement until midnight was a clear sign that things were close. Northern has relied heavily on projections, but no one can fault it for its ability to produce shareholder benefits.

Hanson

THE chart tells the story of the Hanson conglomerate, from its first listing to the recent series of demergers.

It also explains why Lord Hanson once again this week walked against the market for underestimating Hanson and the already demerged US Industries, Imperial Tobacco and Millenium Chemicals. The Energy Group, consisting of Peabody, the US coal group, and Eastern, the British electricity company, is to be demerged in early 1997. Expect details soon.

In January the sum of the parts was around 207p, but when Lord Hanson did his calculations on December 2 for the annual report he reckoned the figure stood at 150p.

There are a variety of explanations, such as the

uncertain regulatory outlook for electricity and continuing difficult conditions in the building industry.

Hanson shares, however, were for almost the entire duration of the chart excited by the prospects of the next big deal. Market excitement usually raised the price earnings ratio of Hanson to a level at which it was easy

enough to digest the unfortunate prey.

Excitement also followed a Hanson deal as the market gasped at the prices Hanson obtained for breaking up the unwanted bits of its target. But without the deals there is no excitement and without the excitement the rating has



Amec

FOR a company that has built a fair few of them, Kvaerner would seem to have missed the boat on Amec. For much of the autumn, the Amec share price was ahead of the £1 or so that the Norwegians paid for the 26 per cent stake in the contractor, but Kvaerner has yet to sell. The presence of such an overhang is holding the Amec share price back, which explains yesterday's muted reaction to the Spie Beutegut deal.

This is a merger in all but name. Amec having the right both to buy any loose shares from Spie employees and to purchase the rest outright at a price set by independent valuers at the end of 2002. Mergers between builders tend to be about cost-cutting — the enhancing of margins by losing overlapping workforces and one of two head offices — but not in this case. This is, at heart, a way of injecting Amec's areas of special

ist expertise into Spie's operations. The merged business will have turnover approaching £5 billion and profits in the range of £40 million to £50 million, to go on City estimates and a forecast to employees from Spie. The minority stake will have to be equity-accounted by Amec, and, on the City's numbers, it represents a 25 per cent earnings enhancement in the first full year. It also represents a sensible way forward for a contractor too reliant on the difficult British market. However, two doubts remain. French-British mergers have a poor record — and that Kvaerner stake is still there.

Meconic

MECONIC is the country's only legal supplier of controlled drugs such as cocaine, methadone and a variety of opiates — for medicinal purposes. The company has been able to grow rapidly in the past few years as painkillers

such as cocaine have become increasingly available over the counter. This buoyancy has enabled Meconic to ride a decline in opiate product margins resulting from a poor poppy harvest. The company is all too aware that its monopoly supplier position is a privilege and decided that interests are better served by swallowing some of the short-term costs of a raw material price rise.

Meconic has also diversified, adding Phoenix, which provides contract chemicals to drug companies. Phoenix has also given Meconic access to vital markets, such as the US, from which the company was previously excluded by international regulations on exports of controlled drugs.

The company's success and good growth prospects have been fully recognised, with the shares now nearly £2 above their 1995 float pricing of 135p. Shareholders who have developed the Meconic habit will probably want to stick with the company.

MOVERS OF THE WEEK

Current	Week's	Change	Notes
Newman Tonks	151p	+40p	FKG bids
JB Group	130p	+27p	Merges with Lloyd Thompson
Globe New	215p	+40p	Profits soaring
Essex Products	175p	+10p	Profits soaring
General Accident	760p	+72p	Bid speculation
Burnfield	141p	+42p	Fairly bid
Shearwood Group	442p	+14p	Second profits warning
Chyd Petroleum	1177p	+57p	Gulf Canada Resources bids
Railtrack	583p	+58p	Buying for the dividend

There were also gains for

COMMODITIES

ICE-LSOR (London 6.00pm)

CRUDE OILS (\$/barrel FOB)

Brand Physical 24.08 -0.10
Brent 15 day (Feb) 23.70 -0.10
Brent 15 day (Mar) 23.10 -0.10
WTI Intermediate (Feb) 22.18 -0.08
WTI Intermediate (Mar) 21.50 -0.08

PRODUCTS (\$/MT)

Spot CIF NW Europe (bids delivery)

Gas Oil 215.00-215.50
Gas Oil 215.00-215.50
Gas Oil 215.00-215.50
Gas Oil 215.00-215.50

MEAT & LIVESTOCK

COMMISSION

Average London prices as representative

on 20 December 1996

(£/kg live)

Beef 10.12-10.15
Lamb 10.12-10.15
Pork 10.12-10.15
Chicken 10.12-10.15

Grain

Wheat 10.12-10.15
Barley 10.12-10.15
Oats 10.12-10.15
Rye 10.12-10.15

Oilseeds

Soyabean 10.12-10.15
Rapeseed 10.12-10.15
Sunflower 10.12-10.15
Mustard 10.12-10.15

Metals

Copper 10.12-10.15
Zinc 10.12-10.15
Nickel 10.12-10.15
Aluminium 10.12-10.15

Options

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Options

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Put 10.12-10.15
Strike 10.12-10.15
Expiry 10.12-10.15

LONDON FINANCIAL FUTURES

Period Open High Low Set Vol

FTSE 100 4077.6 4077.6 4077.6 4077.6 4077.6

FTSE 250 3322.7 3322.7 3322.7 3322.7 3322.7

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MONEY RATES

Base Rates Clearing Banks Finance Rate

Discount Market Loans Overnight Night 5%

Treasury Bills (Daily) 2 months 5.5% 3 months 5.5% 6 months 5.5%

Prime Bank Rates

1 month 5.5% 3 months 5.5% 6 months 5.5%

12 months 5.5%

Overnight 5.5%

1 month 5.5%

3 months 5.5%

6 months 5.5%

12 months 5.5%

Overnight 5.5%

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12 months 5.5%

Overnight 5.5%

1 month 5.5%

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6 months 5.5%

12 months 5.5%

Overnight 5.5%

OTHER STERLING

Australia 1.2501-1.2513

Canada 1.2501-1.2513

Denmark 1.2501-1.2513

France 1.2501-1.2513

Germany 1.2501-1.2513

Italy 1.2501-1.2513

Japan 1.2501-1.2513

Netherlands 1.2501-1.2513

Norway 1.2501-1.2513



PENSIONS 27

Don't miss the bus in the retirement race

WEEKEND MONEY

CREDIT CARDS 28

How to avoid the costly debt hangover



THE TIMES PERSONAL FINANCE NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

New year greetings for the Halifax savers

Anne Ashworth and Caroline Merrell report on the latest moves by building societies on the rocky road to conversion

Four million borrowers and savers this week feared for their new year windfalls, after the announcement that the Woolwich had joined the militant Alliance & Leicester in the struggle to amend the Building Societies Bill.

Both societies oppose the proposal to remove the five-year takeover protective ring that currently encircles any society launching itself on the stock market.

This shield against predators will be lost if the society itself becomes an aggressor. So strong were the objections of the Alliance & Leicester to this provision that it threatened last month to postpone its conversion which will spread £1,000 average payouts among its members.

The Woolwich said this week that had it known that converting societies would not be safeguarded, it would have taken a longer route to conversion, making takeovers before its market debut.

Woolwich and A&L members should not despair because both societies are proceeding, as before, towards conversion and it seems that neither will abandon its plans purely because they may be left vulnerable to aggressors.

There have been rumours that the A&L was rethinking its April stock market launch as it was likely to coincide with a general election. But as the membership has voted in favour of conversion the process must go ahead.

Savers and borrowers with Halifax and Northern Rock, the two other societies floating next year, need have no trepidation. Halifax members can look forward to getting the full details of their share payout within weeks, more than two years after the float was announced.

The Halifax has already waived its right to protection, partly because it wishes to pursue takeovers, while the Northern Rock says that it has no intentions of bidding for anyone.

This week the Halifax revealed that the cost of merging with the Leeds and becoming a bank would be some £413 million, with some £153 million of this being spent on communicating with members. The distribution of voting packs being sent to nine million qualifying members early next month will by itself set the society back to the tune of £10 million to £20 million.

With eight printing companies involved, 60 Royal Mail lorries will work non-stop for eight days, as will 13 mailing houses. Those who love a statistic will be interested to learn that if the pages of all the documents were laid side by side they would cover 160,000 miles — five times the circumference of the world.

The aim of this operation is to ensure that members cast their votes for or against the conversion. The result of the poll will be known at the special general meeting to be held in February. The society expects to be a quoted company and a bank by June.

When floated the Halifax will have a similar market capitalisation to Prudential, HSBC, GEC and BTR. Halifax shares should be much sought after, especially as it will join the FT-SE 100 index of leading shares. But it became clear this week that Halifax members

expecting to make a quick killing on their shares could be disappointed if a proposal to delay the fast-track entry into the index goes ahead.

The FT-SE Actuaries UK Indices Committee, which compiles the FT-SE 100 and FT-SE all-share indices, is concerned that the Halifax is not making any of the £10 billion of shares it is issuing available to institutional investors in the City. It says fund managers will be forced to scramble after the few shares sold immediately by Halifax members. The committee believes that the shares could become overvalued, causing a distortion in the market and is proposing a two or three-week delay to enable the City to buy the shares in a more orderly way.

This could depress prices for

Halifax members wanting to exchange their shares for cash straight away.

Tracker funds — which automatically buy all stocks in the FT-SE 100 — would avoid buying Halifax. It is argued, leaving the price to plummet as an estimated 900,000 members sold out regardless. Members of the societies changing their status in 1997 — Bristol & West, Halifax, Northern Rock and Woolwich — should not forget, amid the Christmas and new year festivities, that they must have at least £100 in their accounts on December 31, 1996, or lose their entitlement to free shares.

Those Bristol & West, Halifax and Woolwich savers who stand to qualify for the additional variable distribution of shares being made by these societies must top up their accounts to the level that they were at, at the first qualifying date.

WEEKEND MONEY
is edited by Anne Ashworth

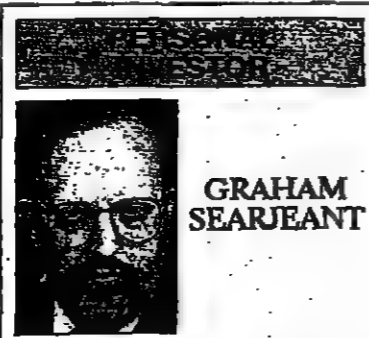
Good value beats a bargain

The easiest investment opportunity of 1996 was to have the right deposit in the right building society at the right time. In the long run, however, investing is no more about collecting windfalls than tax policy should be. One useful lesson of 1996 is that even beating pretty average sort of averages is not so easy.

Over the past 12 months, the FT-SE 100 index of leading UK shares has risen about 13 per cent. With added dividends of 4 per cent, that gave a better return than most analysts expected a year ago and better than the average annual return looked for by pension fund actuaries. But virtually all the gains came between July and October as it became clear that the British economy was belatedly picking up again and that world interest rates would not push ours higher.

Within the overall average, there were the usual winners and losers. This year banks boomed, brewers drooped and gold mines lost all their early rises as inflation stayed at bay. Investors who tracked the London share market average should be content. Seemingly brighter prospects disappointed.

Government gilt-edged stocks have fallen a touch over 12 months, so earning twice as much income did not compensate. But the second half was stronger, in line with sterling. If you put your money in overseas markets, however, the improving pound spoilt returns in terms of what they will buy at home. That is a snag more familiar to Japanese investors than British, who are used to currency gains overseas.



GRAHAM SEARJEANT

Partly as a result, the average investment trust had a relatively poor year.

To the surprise of many non-American sceptics, the Dow Jones industrial average has risen by more than a quarter, twice as fast as the FT-SE 100. In essence, the American economy and big companies continued to grow healthily yet avoided rising short-term interest rates. The sceptics were proved wrong and, although some sharp correction is still likely after two gungho years of rising share prices, predictions of a crash begin to look like sour grapes.

Measured in end-1996 sterling, however, those who missed Wall Street's latest rise missed nothing. Returns are a shade less than an index-tracking UK fund should have achieved. Much the same applies to continental investment, even for those not entangled in the Morgan Grenfell mess. Sterling investors would, on average, have lost a fifth of their money in Japanese shares and even buoyant Hong Kong did not beat

London by much. Most smaller Asian markets had a poor year, in part because US investors preferred Wall Street. Even Templeton Emerging Markets trust, a long-term global winner, could not match the FT-SE 100.

Many UK private investors will look enviously at the average too. Several of the 100 shares that make up that index were real dogs in 1996. Even worse, most of these were among the most popular shares. For instance, British Gas, the second most widely held company in Britain, lost 30 per cent of its stock market value.

Many of us were buying the wrong new investments too. A list of the ten most popular share purchases by private investors through Fidelity Brokerage Services last year makes a good case for switching to unit trusts. It included four notable 1996 losers: Hanson, British Gas again, Tadpole Technology and BTR. Eurotunnel was not a star; Glaxo Wellcome and BT were sub-average. Only Asda and National Power shone. The odd one out was Trafalgar House. If you bought last December, a rescue bid would have doubled your money by spring. But most 1995 bargain-hunters had their fingers burnt.

The best guide to long-term share picking is to search for good value. But value and apparent cheapness are not the same. Too many of us, it seems, approach the stock market like the January sales, eager to pounce on famous name brands selling at half price. The goods are usually faulty.

INVESTORS OFFERED CASH OR UNITS

Nearly all the 90,000 investors in the three trusts suspended by Morgan Grenfell at the end of August will get some form of compensation for the losses caused by the irregularities in the funds.

Anyone with investments in the Morgan Grenfell European Growth trust, the Europe fund and the European Capital Growth fund between August 1, 1995, and September 5, 1996, will be offered compensation in cash or extra units. It is expected that it will be paid by April. Investors will also receive 6 per cent interest, dating from September 5, 1995.

The three funds were suspended because they had breached the regulatory limits on unquoted companies.

The level of compensation will be set in relation to a special European Index of funds constructed by Microcap. The fund performance company, unfortunately, Morgan Grenfell had failed to alert the

company yesterday that it was releasing details of the compensation package — so the data on the index was not available.

However, similar data from another company, HSW, could give a guide to the level of compensation. For instance, £1,000 invested in the Morgan Grenfell Europe Growth trust at August 1, 1995, would have been worth £958 on September 5, 1996, a fall of 4.19 per cent. An index of European companies moved up 12 per cent over that period. An investor would, therefore, get about £162 for every £1,000 invested.

The thousands of investors who put their personal equity plan money into this fund at the end of the tax year will get even more compensation. A full £6,000 invested on March 15 would have been worth £4,800 at September 5 — a fall of 20 per cent. The index moved up by about 1 per cent over that period, so investors could get around £1,200. Comment, page 27

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Pep security guaranteed — just like that

Limited-risk plans
may appeal, but
there are drawbacks,
Gavin Lumsden says

**HOR
MISS**



Fund managers are like magicians with tricks up their sleeves

Banks and fund managers are proving once again that they are magicians with lots of tricks up their sleeves.

With stock markets continuing their impressive yo-yo impersonations, amid gloomy forecasts of low growth next year, you would expect the average investment industry wizard to be a bit depressed. Not a bit of it. The latest wheeze to beguile investors is the so-called "guaranteed", or limited-risk, personal equity plan (Pep), which provides capital security, but not a lot else.

This week Barclays launched the second tranche of its Guaranteed Pep, and HSBC Asset Management, sister company to the Midland, announced it had raised £5.6 million for UK Equity Plus 3, its third limited-risk Pep from Dublin.

NatWest, Scottish Widows, Edinburgh Fund Managers, John Govett and even Marks & Spencer are already in the market and Legal &

General. Save & Prosper and Commercial Union have all got development teams working on a product.

Broadly speaking, the new breed of Peps offer one of two guarantees. The first will provide 100 per cent capital security if you keep the Pep for a fixed period, usually five years.

The second guarantee, known as the protected floor approach, is more flexible as it regularly sets a limit below which the fund cannot fall, no matter what happens to the market. A typical level is 98 per cent a quarter, or 95 per cent a year. This is appealing because it locks in growth and protects it from future falls. It is particularly useful if you are planning to take your money out when the market has just dropped, as it did two weeks ago.

Although superficially simple, guaranteed Peps rely on complex bets on the FT-SE 100 index using expensive derivative instruments. Up to 5 per cent of their assets can be

tied up in derivatives, missing out on the full return from equities. Worse still, many miss out on the dividends companies pay shareholders. This income constitutes 30 per cent of the total return of the index to investors.

Take the Barclays Guaranteed Pep, which operates the first type of

guarantee. It invests in a unit trust that gets capital and income growth by tracking the FT-SE 100 index of the top 100 companies in the UK. If at the end of five years your investment has fallen, the bank promises to make up the difference. If the index grows, you get all the growth. Cannot lose? Consider this. If you

leave the Pep in the first year you automatically lose a massive 12.2 per cent of your capital in charges. In addition to a 5 per cent bid/offer spread, the bank levies a 1 per cent unit trust fee, a 1.2 per cent guarantee charge, and, worst of all, a 5 per cent withdrawal fee. This latter charge stays at 5 per cent in the second year, 3 per cent in years three and four and drops to 1 per cent in year five.

Barclays emphasises that the Pep is designed to be a five-year investment and says the withdrawal charge simply covers the cost of the future and options deals it has written to underpin the guarantee.

In contrast, Marks & Spencer's Guaranteed Capital Investment Plan, which also tracks the FT-SE 100, offers a money-back guarantee and is due to be reissued in February. It is more cost-effective with no initial charge, a 1 per cent annual management charge and a 1.5 per cent guarantee fee. Nevertheless, these charges mean it will underperform the index by 2.5 per cent a year.

In the second camp we have another example of an FT-SE tracker, the Govett UK Equity Safeguard Pep. By protecting 98 per cent of the assets each quarter and adjusting the floor, this Pep could produce a better return than Barclays or

Marks & Spencer. However, unlike the other two, the Govett Pep receives only capital growth from the index. Charges are 5.5 per cent initial and 1.25 per cent annual.

NatWest also offers a Pepable Safeguard unit trust, although it is rebased annually and invests 30 per cent in international equities for diversification. Every June 1 it sets a protected floor price at 95 per cent of the selling price of the fund's units on that day. If the unit price rises by more than 10 per cent, the floor is immediately reset.

The advantage of NatWest's approach is that the most an investor can lose in a year is 5 per cent, whereas with the Govett Pep, total losses for a year are potentially 8 (4x2) per cent. However, the UK stock market has fallen continuously for a year only once in the past 50 years. Rebased once a year costs less in derivatives deals as well.

The minimum investment in the fund is £1,000 lump sum or £50 per month. There is an initial charge of 4.25 per cent and an annual management fee of 1.5 per cent. Edinburgh Fund Managers' Safety First fund also protects 95 per cent of the fund on an annual basis. It charges 3.5 per cent initial and 1.25 per cent annual and a 1 per cent exit charge in the first year.

THE PROBLEM

THE biggest problem with guaranteed products is that you could end up doing worse than if you had just left your money on deposit. Take HSBC's Equity Plus 3. It offered capital security plus a minimum of 18 per cent capital growth over five years. This works out at an annual rate of 3.36 per cent, which HSBC admits is bettered by the building societies, although it rightly points out that the potential for further growth is unlimited. However, once again this upside is linked to capital growth in the FT-SE 100 only. As Mark Dampier, director of Churchill Investments, near Bristol, says: "There is no one product which will solve all investors' needs. If people want growth from the stock market but want to protect themselves against risk, they should seek advice on how to construct a simple portfolio divided between cash, gilts and equities." The price of both kinds of protection can also include high charges and an investment performance a third less than from a non-guaranteed Pep.

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Caroline Merrell on new offers to boost a growing army of child investors

Saving when young can really add up

For children, money gifts are always appealing. When the joy of this year's Buzz Lightyear doll has faded, cash will still keep its attraction.

A report published earlier this month by the NOP, the market research group, shows that young people form early links with banks and building societies. More than 50 per cent of children in Britain between the ages of seven and nine, now have an account with a bank or building society, with 13 per cent of all respondents having two or more accounts.

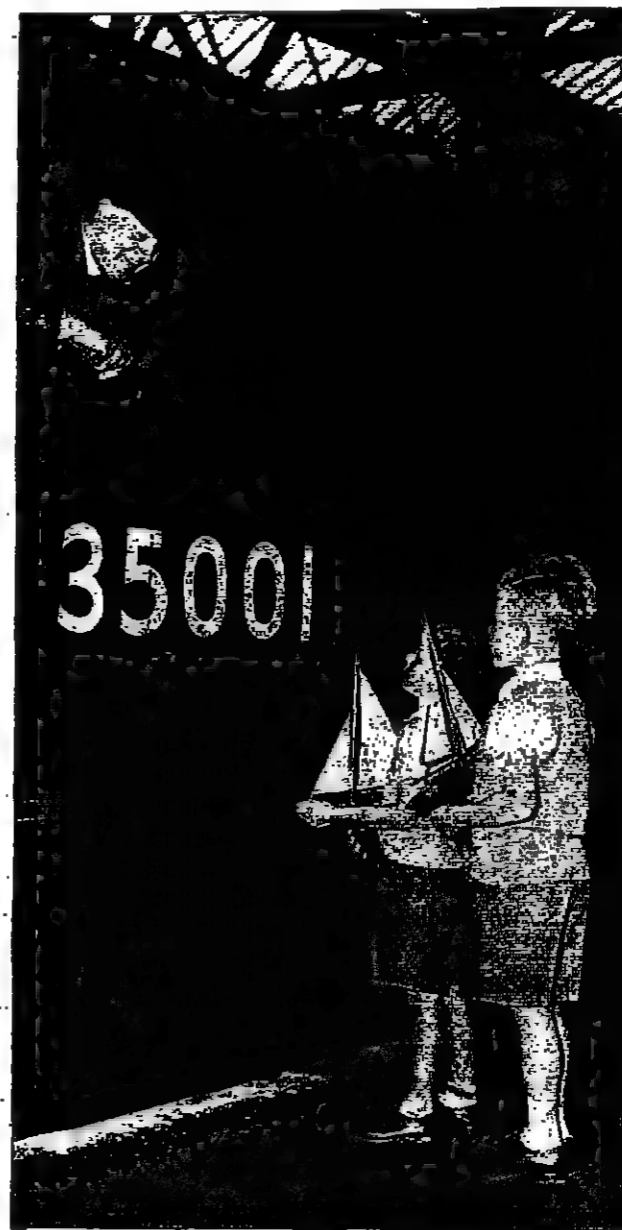
National Savings, banks and building societies all offer special savings plans for children. Children Bonus Bonds pay a tax-free fixed rate 6.75 per cent if held for five years. Minimum investment is £25. With £20 you can open an Investment Account which pays 4.75 per cent. One month's notice is needed for withdrawals, ensuring that freespending youngsters must curb their retail urges.

Moneyfacts, the savings information specialist, recommends a number of children's accounts, including the Halifax Building Society's Little Xtra/Quest. This instant access account has a 3.1 per cent interest rate with a minimum

investment of £1. The account comes with a moneybox, sticker, badge, passbook wallet, carrier and magazine. Another recommended account is from the Nationwide Building Society. This instant access account pays 3.4 per cent and offers goodies such as a compact disc, magazine and welcome pack.

Other less well known societies that offer better rates of interest include the Chorley & District, Darlington, Harpenden and Leeds & Holbeck. For instance, the Chorley & District offers an instant access account with 5.95 per cent interest. Darlington's Foundation instant access account offers an interest rate of 5.75 per cent, while Harpenden Building Society offers the 18 Club account which has a minimum investment of £5. The interest here is 6 per cent, but no withdrawals are permitted until the accountholder reaches 18 years of age. The Leeds & Holbeck Building Society has an instant access account which has a minimum investment of £1,000 and offers 6 per cent interest.

The highest interest rate is offered by the tiny Melton Mowbray Building Society. Its Sunny Bond, which has a 30-day term of notice, offers 6.5 per cent interest.



Children become model savers with the right train of thought

Go East and West for the bargains

If you are thinking of spending the £1,000 bounty from the flotation of your building society early, a shopping trip to a distant destination might be worth considering. The strength of sterling means that goods bought in foreign climes will be cheaper, and shopping in a new city can be a novelty.

However, the price of standard air fares at this time of year increase, so any savings could be wiped out. The British Airways return fair to New York, for instance, rockets to £648. However, with the dollar standing at about \$1.61, a shopping trip to delve into the delights of Saks of Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdales, and Tiffs

could prove attractive. Shopping in the US can also bring rich pickings in the form of cheap electronic goods — such as compact discs and tapes — and cheap clothes and designer brands.

Those who want to shop a little closer to home could opt to fly to Paris for £91. However, those looking for a bargain should wait for the new year sales.

Another favoured destination is Istanbul in Turkey. The Turkish lira is currently trading at a staggering 168,484 to the pound. Istanbul's covered bazaar, in the heart of the city, houses hundreds of stalls selling copper, leather and rugs. Winter is low season — so it could be the

moment to try to get a bargain. Haggle over the price is also in order.

A return British Airways flight to Prague, in the Czech Republic, will cost about £219. Favourite goods are Bohemian crystal, second-hand books and memorabilia.

For the truly bargain conscious, the ten-hour flight to Bangkok could be worthwhile. A British Airways fare could cost between £739 and £1,244. The keen shopper can get cheap clothing, gems and antiques from the Wat Mahathat's market and Khao San road.

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Inefficient stock picking by life offices costs clients thousands of pounds, says Marianne Curphey

Don't miss the bus in the pension race

Personal pension holders could miss out on thousands of pounds of retirement income because the investment strategy of their life office is "woolly and underdeveloped", it was claimed this week. In many cases, they would have been better off buying a pension from a big investment house with clearer investment and stock-picking goals. The report, published by Bacon & Woodrow, the consultant, suggests that many life offices are so uncompetitive and inefficient that they will simply disappear.

B&W estimates that the number of companies selling personal pensions will fall from almost 100 to about 12 by the year 2000.

B&W found institutional managers produced far better returns than those achieved by many life offices that lacked "measurable objectives".

Andrew Warwick-Thompson, who compiled the survey, said that the average institutional managed fund outperformed its retail counterpart by 1.8 per cent a year over the past five years.

He added: "The best retail managers can compete head to head with their institutional counterparts, but many investors in personal pensions run the risk of lower long-term returns which will depress their retirement income. The big investment houses — among them Mercury, Schroders, Morgan Grenfell, Gartmore and PDM — are starting to challenge the traditional province of the life offices. Most independent financial advisers and personal pension investors are not sufficiently demanding of retail managers."

B&W sees the real problem for private investors as the dearth of good statistical information that would enable them to make choices about the funds to buy.

Figures showing simple accumulated returns did not paint the whole picture because the investor needed

to know how risky the fund was in comparison to others in the sector, and whether the returns would have been greater if money had been put into the fund at various times during the year.

Mr Warwick-Thompson said some life offices described their investment strategy as aiming to achieve "above-average performance with the minimum of risk over the long term".

"Investors should be asking, what is the long term and how many years? How risky is the fund compared to its peers, and what criteria

does the fund have to meet to merit the description 'above average'?" B&W has drawn up a shortlist of pension fund managers that it rates highly, but, unfortunately for investors, it does not reveal which these companies are.

However, of the 308 funds analysed, only 27 met B&W's strict criteria. Among the providers were Norwich Union and Standard Life, which were both singled out for special praise by B&W last year.

Funds were excluded if they had poor performance, were closed to new business, had less than £20 million under management (which was considered to be too small to be successful in the competitive life sector) and were not available through independent financial advisers on a nil commission basis.

The providers that made it through this screening process are listed below. However, a provider may have one fund that was outstanding and others that performed less well. The successful providers were Abbey Life; Allied Dunbar; AXA Equity & Law; Clerical Medical; Commercial Union; Friends Provident; General Accident; Gai Fidelity; Perpetual and Stewart Ivory; Gartmore; Guardian; Legal & General; Lincoln National's Schroders, Managed 3 and Managed 4 funds; London & Manchester's Ex Balanced and Ex Flexible; M&G Pension Managed; Mercury International and Portfolio; National Mutual; Norwich Union; NPI; Old Mutual; Prudential; Holborn Managed and Prudential MPP Discretionary; Scottish Life; Scottish Mutual and Scottish Provident; Skandia's Fidelity, Gartmore, Perpetual, Morgan Grenfell and Balanced managed funds; Standard Life, Sun Alliance (now Royal & Sun Alliance) and Sun Life.

Mr Warwick-Thompson said life offices in the future might be forced to contract out funds to investment houses to improve their performance.



BACON & WOODROW claimed that the majority of published research lacked analytical sophistication and suggested investors should ask these basic questions of fund managers:

□ What is the fund's objective? Is this objective measurable? Against what is it measured?

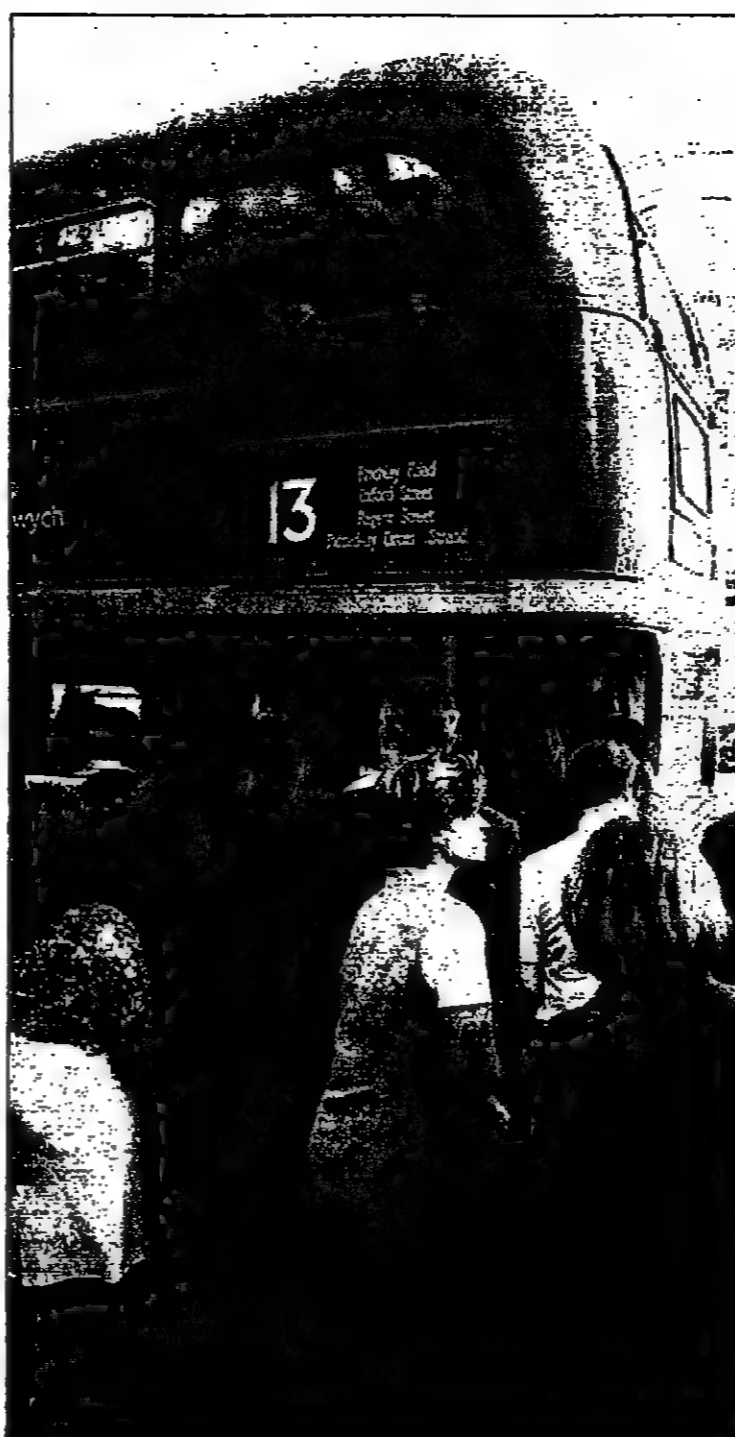
□ Has the fund met its objective in the past?

□ Does the manager have well-defined and robust asset allocation and stock selection processes?

□ Can the manager attribute the added value of each stage of his investment processes to his fund's performance?

Mr Warwick-Thompson said some of the traditional life offices had problems defining what their investment objectives were.

"We asked these questions of the funds we surveyed. The retail managers, with some exceptions, were inefficient and did not know what they were trying to achieve."



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COMMENT
ANNE ASHWORTH
Personal Finance
Editor

Morgan Grenfell investors owe thanks to Imro

Morgan Grenfell could have used the announcement of compensation for the 90,000 hapless investors in its European funds as an opportunity to salvage its reputation. However, the group's unimpressive conduct suggests that it has failed to learn from its mistakes and seems not to realise how profoundly the episode has damaged its image.

Yesterday the group was more concerned about the effect of the payment on the share price of its German parent, the Frankfurt stock market than to make public as soon as possible the already delayed details of the £200 million package.

This sudden anxiety about the impact of the news on the Deutsche Bank price was puzzling since the amounts involved had appeared in *The Times* two weeks ago.

But much in the whole affair has been inexplicable and blatant in its disregard for investors' interests.

Throughout, Morgan Grenfell has failed to respect its customers' fundamental right to know what is happening to their money. This is shown very clearly in the timetable of events. In April this year, the group became concerned that Peter Young, the investment manager for the three funds, was putting too much money into high-risk unquoted securities.

At this time, the funds were newly swollen with cash from those using their £6,000 annual personal equity plan allowances. They had believed they were putting their money into solid European businesses. Morgan Grenfell did nothing to disabuse them of that notion.

Investors first learnt of the scandal at the start of September. A full explanation of events was not given, although Morgan Grenfell did

issue an apology. Subsequently, however, the group has been less than forthcoming. Even in the compensation announcement, Morgan Grenfell promises only that no investor will actually "lose money" as a result of "recent events" (see page 25).

The final payouts are likely to be more generous than this. But investors owe their gratitude for the settlement more to Imro, the investor watchdog that has so carefully safeguarded their interests. Its intervention has been one of the few praiseworthy features in this sorry affair.

Guaranteed?

IT IS the cherished ambition of every fund management group to convert the committed building society investor to the stock market cause.

The pursuit of this aim has led to the creation of various types of schemes that promise the excitement of an investment in shares and the solidity of a savings account.

The two may be mutually incompatible, but that does not deter the marketing men. They know that the word "guaranteed" can convince even the most sceptical saver. Add the beguiling words "tax free" and you are on to a winner, which is why unit trust groups are currently putting so much muscle behind the promotion and development of their guaranteed personal equity plans (Peps).

The guaranteed Pep seems like the best invention ever (see page 26). You gain if the market rises, but do not lose if it falls. However, as always, the small print contains the true facts. You may not benefit by the full amount of any index increase and may pay heavily if you need your cash in a hurry. Barclays, for example, will slice off 12 per cent. Such meanness is beyond even a building society.

Income strategy could hamper M&G's trust launch

M&G, one of the UK's biggest fund managers, is unlikely to win much support from advisers and investors for its new investment trust, aimed at the personal equity plan (Pep) market.

The split capital trust will follow M&G's overall strategy of picking UK stocks that produce higher-than-average income — it is this particular strategy that has been M&G's undoing over the past 12 months. An analysis of the performance of the UK stock

market shows that companies geared for growth did far better than companies that paid out increasing dividends.

For instance, M&G's smaller companies unit trust fell 4 per cent in a year when an average smaller companies unit trusts rose 10 per cent, and the stock market rose 6 per cent. M&G's Equity investment trust, launched at this time last year to coincide with the Pep season, has risen only slightly since launch in spite of attracting nearly £300

million. The group has come under increasing criticism for this philosophy, some independent financial advisers have stopped putting their clients' money with the group, and, last week, at its annual results briefing, David Morgan, M&G group managing director, faced strong criticism of the investment performance of



its funds. The proportion of its trusts in the top quartile has dropped from 81 per cent to 12 per cent over the past ten years. M&G acknowledged that its performance during the year had been poor but said that the UK was now at a stage in the economic cycle where high-yielding stocks would outperform. It said that the

new investment trust aimed to take advantage of this shift.

M&G is also launching the fund at this time to coincide with the winding up of its Dual II investment trust — it is hoping that investors will keep their cash with the group.

Ian Millward, Chase de Vere adviser, said: "We have not been recommending M&G for some time. This fund does not have anything particular to make it worth recommending, although the charges are low."

The fund will be launched in February and will have a five-week launch period. It will carry no initial charge and will have no withdrawal fees. It will be possible to save as little as £50 a month into the trust, which carries a minimum investment of £1,000. Investors can buy a package of growth and income units, and zero-dividend preference shares, or they can just buy the growth and income shares.

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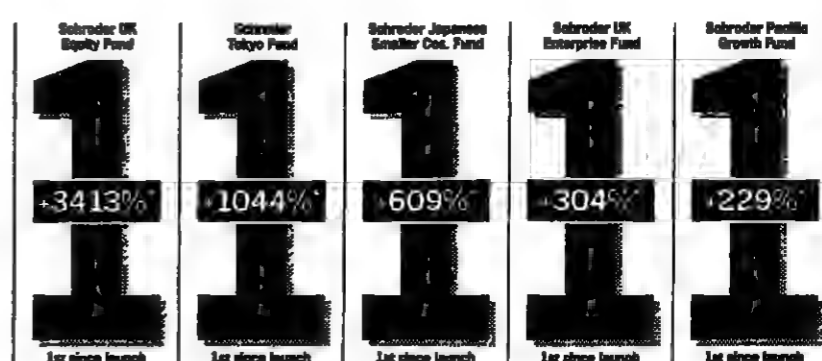
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**Source: Investment Intelligence at 01.12.96. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. The value of investments and the income from them may fall as well as rise and investors may not get back the amount originally invested. Exchange rates may cause the value of investments to rise or fall. Issued by Schroder Unit Trusts Limited, Sector House, 25 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4EL. Regulated by IMRO and by the Personal Investment Authority. On the internet at <http://www.schroders.com>

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Nathan Yates looks at ways to save money by switching credit cards

How to avoid a costly new year hangover

Christmas credit card spending is set to hit record levels and for many cardholders a spring debt hangover looms. With 40 per cent of adults likely to spend £400 or more during the festive season, buying on plastic could exceed last year's £4.4 billion figure — and shoppers are unlikely to repay entirely in January. But for those who are faced with a growing repayment burden next year, help is at hand from a new wave of competitive credit card deals.

A survey carried out by *The Times* shows just how much difference the new offers could make to those with negative balances this spring. The £483 six-month cost of a £5,000 debt with Barclaycard can be reduced by £165 if the balance is transferred to Hamilton Direct's Visa card. Move it to Beneficial Bank's English Heritage Visa and the cost will be reduced by £200.40. Better still, transfer it to MBNA's Mastercard/Visa and the saving will be £241.80, which in effect means that the interest paid over the six-month period will be cut by more than half.

For smaller borrowing habits the expenditure may matter less, but even with an outstanding balance of £2,000 it is still possible to make significant savings. A £2,000 debt at Barclaycard costs £193.20 over



If you shop like Alicia Silverstone does in *Clueless*, it need not spell financial disaster

six months. Through transferring the balance, this can be reduced by between £57.60 at the People's Bank of Connecticut and £96.96 at MBNA, Capital One Bank or Bradford and Bingley Building Society. In each of these cases the transfer of balance costs nothing, because there is no annual fee.

Some of the biggest savings to be made in the new year come from American credit card companies such as the People's Bank of Connecticut or MBNA, who are accustomed to heavier borrowing. But British companies have

joined the race to undercut traditional main players — and even some high street banks such as Midland Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland now offer reduced rate deals.

The cheapest rate credit card at the moment is Co-operative Bank's Advantage Visa, which charges 7.9 per cent APR until April 1 next year. Like Hamilton Direct's Visa or R Fleming/S&P Base Rate Linked, the Advantage card recoups some of the costs of the reduced rate by offering no interest-free period. Borrowers who intend escaping

from interest payments altogether should remember this.

Traditional major UK card companies can claim that certain cut-rate deals are merely ways of enticing borrowers into paying more later. So-called "teaser" rates, like MBNA's 9.9 per cent, usually expire after six months. In MBNA's case, it is replaced by a rate of 18.9 per cent on all new transactions, excluding cash and cheques.

But some of the new cards manage to stay attractive long after the festive overspend has been mastered. The People's Bank of Connecticut offers its Mastercard/Visa at 14.4 per cent APR — 8.1 per cent less than Barclaycard's rate. The interest-free period for both cards is an identical 56 days. Unlike other cut-rate cards, it is not limiting its reduction to a six month "teaser" offer.

It's a formula which will attract both consistent overspenders and those who can keep repayments under control. Ron Urquhart, of People's Bank, says: "The credit card industry is changing in the UK and I believe we are at the cutting edge. There is increasing competition to improve services and this means consumers will be the winners. And yes, it also means that overspending on your plastic may not be such a serious mistake this Christmas."

Bid frenzy in the television sector has sent share prices sky high in expectation of more takeovers. As a result, the sector is trading at a 40 per cent premium to the rest of the stock market, presenting few obvious investment bargains.

But a few well-chosen stocks should bear fruit as further consolidation and deal making is inevitable. Next year will see the launch of Channel 5, the UK's fifth terrestrial channel, and the first trumpet blasts in the digital TV revolution.

Lorna Tilbian, media analyst at Panmure Gordon, the stockbroker, says: "All TV companies are benefiting from higher advertising revenues in the fourth quarter, reflecting the return of the 'feel-good' factor in the high street. The Advertising Association is expecting 7 per cent growth in revenue this year compared with last." Her favourite stock is Carlton Communications, which at a 15 per cent premium to the rest of the stock market, is relatively cheap.

This year has seen the three big players — Carlton, Granada, and United News & Media — begin the grand ITV carve-up, signalled by the merger between United and Lord Hollick's M&I group.

Michael Green's Carlton, the largest independent TV company, which owns the London weekday and Central ITV franchises, added Westcountry, the South West of England ITV franchise, to its roster for £85 million last month.

Scottish TV, part-owned by Flextech, the cable and satellite operator, and the Mirror Group, recently sold its 20 per cent

SECTOR IN FOCUS



Take a look at the TV concerns

stake in ITV to United. And Granada, the leisure and media giant that makes *Coronation Street*, is expected to gobble up the rest of Yorkshire Tyne-Tees TV eventually — it already owns 27 per cent.

significant operational cost savings. But Lord Hollick's stake is a high hurdle to clear. The shoot-out between the two companies could leave investors up on the deal, especially as United must pay £200 a share for ITV under Takeover Panel rules if it wants to buy the rest of the company before the end of October. The shares are now valued at 360p.

The remaining independent franchises — Scottish, Border, Grampian, HTV and Ulster — are unlikely to remain so beyond 1997. But analysts believe that bid activity will be put on hold until share prices cool.

Digital TV, which promises 200-plus channels, pay-per-view TV, and interactive services such as home banking, shopping, and video on demand, has to be good news for programme makers. Whether digital channels are delivered via terrestrial broadcast, satellite, or cable, they will all need content.

Canny companies, such as Flextech, owned by Telecommunications Inc. of the US, and Chris Wright's Chrysalis Group have been busy accumulating programme rights to auction off at a time when popular programmes can command a fat premium.

The BBC has already announced a link with Flextech and is considering a deal with BSkyB, the £8.3 billion satellite broadcaster in which News International, owner of *The Times*, has a 40 per cent stake. BSkyB is pressing ahead with its own "set-top box" technology needed to decode the digital signal.

MATTHEW WALL

No choice but to vent annuity anger

From Mr M. Lawrence

Sir, Mr Bowtell's letter (December 14), while admirably explaining the principle of shared risk, singularly fails to answer the very profound point raised by previous correspondents. The capital in my pension fund is my money. I should be able to choose how I wish to spend it.

Currently, I have to purchase an annuity at some time. The rates on that annuity should reflect how long the insurance company expects me to live for, and should increase the yield above whatever normal reference rate available, to account for repaying me my principal in addition to that normal reference rate. This annuity fails to do.

As a concrete example, I could point to the various

available building society personal issues (PIBs) or perhaps the Standard Chartered personal floating rate note.

Both types of instrument pay well above short-term products, and compare favourably with the yields on longer-term products. So if I were to use my pension fund to purchase either of these I would either gain, or not lose significantly, just in terms of annual interest paid. When I die, both of these types of investment would still be available to my heirs to sell in the market to recover my original capital.

I do not think that anyone could argue that any of the building society issues, or Standard Chartered, represents an unacceptable risk compared to any insurance company, despite the precise terms under which interest may be delayed or avoided in these instruments — the likelihood is vanishingly small.

Finally, to add insult to injury, I know from my own professional experience, which is closely related to both of these types of instrument, that the insurance companies have purchased these types of product in order to back their pension liabilities.

Just think of what they may do with my pension fund when I retire — buy some Standard Chartered (perpetual floating rate notes), pay me the interest and then keep the bond itself when I die. I can manage that myself, thank you. What I want is the choice not to buy an annuity, especially when it is my generation that is paying national insurance contributions for which we will not get any meaningful state pension when retirement finally arrives.

Yours faithfully,

M. LAWRENCE,

Cranfield Park,

Burstable,

Suffolk.

Pension treatment unfair

From Mr C. G. Wyman

Sir, Mr Bowtell's letter explaining annuities (Weekend Money, December 14) does not alter their inequity. What this explanation amounts to is that when pension savings are invested by the annuity provider in fixed-interest securities, pensioners are simultaneously entered into a lottery based on age.

Those who live longer than a certain age receive benefit from other people's savings and those who die before that age pass benefit from their savings to other people. The institutional provider aims to skim off 4 per cent of an annuitant's capital as a fee for being the lottery manager.

Surely it remains unfair that pensioners are compelled by government rules to both

forfeit their pension capital and pay yet more fees by gambling in this way. Why should they not be allowed, if they so choose, simply to invest their own savings in government or other appropriate securities and leave their remaining capital, less tax, to their families at death?

The "income drawdown" scheme referred to by Mr Mitchell (Weekend Money Letters, November 30) offers some escape, but only up to age 75 when the purchase of an annuity becomes compulsory. If that upper age limit were removed much of the inequity would go with it.

Yours faithfully,
C. WYMAN,
The Green,
Blakesley, Towcester,
Northamptonshire.

British Gas delay

From Mr R. Lindley

Sir, Alerted by a letter from Geoffrey Negus, of Solihull, in Weekend Money Letters on June 15 — I also then lived in Solihull — I checked my gas bills to see if I was receiving the 6 per cent discount due for direct debit payments. I was not.

Successive phone calls to British Gas in Solihull produced promises but no action. It has taken two months' effort by the Gas Consumers Council in Birmingham to persuade them to send me a reimbursement.

Thank you, *The Times*, thank you, Mr Negus, and thank you, Gas Consumers Council.

But I am left wondering about British Gas. Are they really so inefficient?

Yours faithfully,

RICHARD LINDLEY,

28 Denham Close,

Winchester.

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Important announcement for investors.

Morgan Grenfell Asset Management Limited and IMRO have agreed a package of compensation for investors in the above funds.

Who is eligible?

Investors will be considered for compensation if they held any of the three funds at any time between 1 August 1995 and 5 September 1996, whether or not they continue to invest in the fund(s).

What is the basis for compensation?

Investors will be compensated for any difference between the actual return they received from their Morgan Grenfell investment(s) and the return provided over the above period by an agreed index of comparable funds drawn from appropriate Micropal* data.

In addition, in the event that investments have lost value, even after this calculation, Morgan Grenfell will compensate investors up to the value of their original investment.

How will compensation be paid?

Those eligible for compensation will have the option of receiving either new units in the relevant fund(s) or cash.

When will compensation be paid?

The process of calculating compensation will begin immediately. Because of the large number of investors in the funds, payments are scheduled to be made at the end of April 1997.

Will interest be paid?

Yes. Investors will receive a payment in respect of interest on their compensation from 5 September 1996 or the date on which their holding in the fund(s) was sold, if earlier, until compensation is paid.

How are PEP holders affected?

The compensation package does not affect the tax-free status of PEPs.

How much will each investor receive?

This will depend on the timing of each investor's purchase(s) and sale(s) in the fund(s), but every investor will be compensated at least up to the level of their original investment. This means that no one will lose money as a result of recent events at Morgan Grenfell.

We will not know how much each investor will receive until we have completed the task of calculating individual payments. This is scheduled for the end of April 1997.

What should investors do now?

Investors need take no action as there is no requirement to register for compensation. We are unable to give estimates of individual compensation payments.

We have written to all investors in the three affected funds on 20 December and will be writing to them again at the end of January 1997 with a history of their transactions in the fund(s) together with further information on the compensation package.



**MORGAN GRENFELL
ASSET MANAGEMENT**

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TRADING PERIOD: Settlement takes place five business days after the day of trade. Changes are calculated on the previous day's close, but adjustments are made when a stock is ex-dividend. Changes, yields and price/earnings ratios are based on middle prices.

1996		Price	Yld
High	Low Company	100	%
522	258 Lloyd's Chem	508 1/2	2.6
208 1/2	140 1/2 MFI	169 1/2	3.1
	100 1/2 MFI	177 1/2	2.1

625	316	Manure (C)	564	-	2	31
626	525	Manure (Joh)	564	-	2	31
27	115	Manure (Rat)	22	-	-	-
1305	616	Milk Bros	1660	-	-	28
603	420	Milk	544	-	7	30
93	31	Oleat (C)	-	-	1	-
655	400	Ordinary Ind	535	-	-	29
854	66	Pantheone Plat	74	-	-	49
56	32	OS Hidge	35	-	-	56
317	191	Rosette	316	-	1	25
105	854	Sears	81	-	1	53
369	14	Signet Group	31	-	1	-
524	389	Smith WH	427	-	1	46

180	830	Sombyco	107%	+ 15	18
352	241	Summit	250	- 2	36
137	90	Stelo	162	-	3.9
411	165	T & S Shares	148	+ 4%	5.8
418	247	Thom	251%	-	6.7
187	159	Tec Pack	182%	+ 4	1.9
4	2	Update & South	3%	-	
684	523	Vendofest	55	+ 1%	2.4
29	12	NEW Group	20	-	
141	86	Wildcat	68%	-	
94	62	Wid of Leather	81%	-	2.6
235	136	Wydale	233%	-	2.1

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526	283	878		460	1.1
400	Surfado		475		
189	123	Bkt Data Mgt	174		3.9
110	80	Media Service	87		4.6
266	232	Marketing Post	475	2	2.4
875	828	CMR	846	11	0.9
255	111	CHI Sp	249	1	2.1
987	187	Card Sp	632	2	0.6
438	285	Capt Group	475	4	1.2
10	54	Chassis	48		5.7
366		Omni Sec.	331	3	3.3

1977	177	+	33
1978	178	+	49
1979	179	+	08
1980	180	+	51
1981	181	+	08
1982	182	+	26
1983	183	+	29
1984	184	+	40
1985	185	+	10
1986	186	+	18
1987	187	+	28
1988	188	+	10
1989	189	+	13
1990	190	+	10
1991	191	+	10
1992	192	+	10
1993	193	+	10
1994	194	+	10
1995	195	+	10
1996	196	+	10
1997	197	+	10
1998	198	+	10
1999	199	+	10
2000	200	+	10
2001	201	+	10
2002	202	+	10
2003	203	+	10
2004	204	+	10
2005	205	+	10
2006	206	+	10
2007	207	+	10
2008	208	+	10
2009	209	+	10
2010	210	+	10
2011	211	+	10
2012	212	+	10
2013	213	+	10
2014	214	+	10
2015	215	+	10
2016	216	+	10
2017	217	+	10
2018	218	+	10
2019	219	+	10
2020	220	+	10
2021	221	+	10
2022	222	+	10
2023	223	+	10
2024	224	+	10
2025	225	+	10
2026	226	+	10
2027	227	+	10
2028	228	+	10
2029	229	+	10
2030	230	+	10
2031	231	+	10
2032	232	+	10
2033	233	+	10
2034	234	+	10
2035	235	+	10
2036	236	+	10
2037	237	+	10
2038	238	+	10
2039	239	+	10
2040	240	+	10
2041	241	+	10
2042	242	+	10
2043	243	+	10
2044	244	+	10
2045	245	+	10
2046	246	+	10
2047	247	+	10
2048	248	+	10
2049	249	+	10
2050	250	+	10
2051	251	+	10
2052	252	+	10
2053	253	+	10
2054	254	+	10
2055	255	+	10
2056	256	+	10
2057	257	+	10
2058	258	+	10
2059	259	+	10
2060	260	+	10
2061	261	+	10
2062	262	+	10
2063	263	+	10
2064	264	+	10
2065	265	+	10
2066	266	+	10
2067	267	+	10
2068	268	+	10
2069	269	+	10
2070	270	+	10
2071	271	+	10
2072	272	+	10
2073	273	+	10
2074	274	+	10
2075	275	+	10
2076	276	+	10
2077	277	+	10
2078	278	+	10
2079	279	+	10
2080	280	+	10
2081	281	+	10
2082	282	+	10
2083	283	+	10
2084	284	+	10
2085	285	+	10
2086	286	+	10
2087	287	+	10
2088	288	+	10
2089	289	+	10
2090	290	+	10
2091	291	+	10
2092	292	+	10
2093	293	+	10
2094	294	+	10
2095	295	+	10
2096	296	+	10
2097	297	+	10
2098	298	+	10
2099	299	+	10
2100	300	+	10

163	163	Knudsen	225	2.0	1
526	351	Realt Sp	225		
347	37	LEASCO	100		
41	13	Less-Scan	75		
125	125	Lewin	150+		
128	40	Leig	110+		
88	452	Logics	250+	5%	11
89	45	Lyn Midgt	275+	1	2.8
92	234	MAC	30+	1	4.6
647	245	M&T Comput	644		2.0
101	65	MH Group	85	1	5.3
120	238	Moran 4	498		5.2
125	174	Mowpaw	1900+	5%	0.4
526	175	Measure Ability	50		

192	141	Micro	902		
193	141	Micro	148		64
129	870	Miso	1117		2
134	134	MITE	187	22	0.9
41	30	News Group	37		6.0
40	30	News Group	37		3.1
173	127	P & P	153	2	2.7
191	191	Party (Alchami)	402		16
107	173	Party	393	8	0.8
435	290	Pigeon	267		1.9
140	79	Pigeon	134	2	2.0
168	102	Pigeon-Mit	137	1	4.5
167	14	Provision	16		16.7

[illegible][illegible]

TELECOMMUNICATIONS				
894	329	BT	329	8.1
894	337	Cable Wireless	478	2.7
894	341	Cable Wireless	167	1.7
714	350	Global Cable	180	0.7
27	351	NYNEX Cable	105	0
24	355	Empire	183	4
24	361	Comcast	285	0.7

60	117% TeleVision	134	-	4	2.1	24
70	239% Paramount	248	-	4	2.2	22

TEXTILES & APPAREL

60	41 Allstate	352	-	5	4.1	20
60	70% Alameda W	80%	-	6	5.1	19
60	181% Alameda Turt	181%	-	6	5.1	12
61	180 Bond (Wint)	180%	-	6	5.1	12

48	127	Robert Gray	130	...	39	14
49	69	Br Mohr	...	...	11.2	15
50	...	...	...	...	30.7	0
51	160	Charmel Gai	162	...	7.4	15
52	117	Cook Vigneri	127	...	9.7	12
53	213	Constantine	217	...	9.5	12
54	...	...	...	...	6.5	15
55	179	Douglas (J)	179	...	2.6	14
56	28	Doris Miel	29	...	8.1	7
57	35	Unconquered	47	...	4.3	11
58	62	Fajal	25	...	9.8	8
59	...	...	107	...	18.4	...
60	6	Foster (John)	77	...	...	...

[illegible]

1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100
1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035	2036	2037	2038	2039	2040	2041	2042	2043	2044	2045	2046	2047	2048	2049	2050	2051	2052	2053	2054	2055	2056	2057	2058	2059	2060	2061	2062	2063	2064	2065	2066	2067	2068	2069	2070	2071	2072	2073	2074	2075	2076	2077	2078	2079	2080	2081	2082	2083	2084	2085	2086	2087	2088	2089	2090	2091	2092	2093	2094	2095	2096	2097	2098	2099	2100

81	Sever	83%	108
82	Swilling Co	86	72
9	Strong & Fisher	20%	81
73	UK Satety	15%	85
101	Water Frank	104	84
85	Worwood	94	88
101	Yorkshire	192%	82

TRANSPORT

107	Air London	184%	...	4.5	10.1
159	Air Mague Air	45%	...	0.6	...
260	Alcatraz, St. Paris	271%	...	3.2	16.7
447	BAW	475%	...	3.0	13.4
464	Br. Airways	806%	...	2.9	11.4
5	Sw. Central Rail. R.	8%	...	...	...
132	Deutsche G.	103%	...	3.8	1.2
152	Dynamos Gas	156%	...	3.6	11.2
278	Eden	409%	...	3.3	11.1
214	Dart	252%	...	2.9	14.7
5	Edinburgh Un.	79%	...	...	...
135	Falstich	391%	...	3.3	14.8
65	Fisher (Lenses)	145%	...	1.9	13.5

7	33	Flint vests	687		
8	37	Go-Round	427 1/2	1 1/2	18 1/2
9	248	Conde Demant	362 1/2	2 1/2	15 1/2
10	417 1/2	Italcant	425 1/2	1 1/2	17 1/2
11	85	Jacobs	729 1/2	2 1/2	24 1/2
12	72 1/2	Low O'Sess Frie	76 1/2	0 1/2	16 1/2
13	345	Messy Dodge	359 1/2	3 1/2	17 1/2
14	140	NFC	179 1/2	3 1/2	18 1/2
15	362	Mail Express	504 1/2	2 1/2	13 1/2
16	372	Condo Group	482 1/2	1 1/2	18 1/2
17	7 1/2	Osaka Villages	80	5 1/2	8 1/2
18	48 1/2	P & O Bld	585 1/2	10 1/2	15 1/2
19	113 1/2	P & O S.S.	113 1/2	0	6 1/2
20	365	Switzerland (P/F)	363	5	12 1/2

40	40	-	5.7	25.5
41	465	+	1.3	45.1
317	700	+	1.4	30.1
67	90	+	1.4	11.7
399	640	+	5	3.2
107	187	+	3	7.0
88	69	-	4	8.5
74	87	-	1	4.8

WATER

512	Amplant	565	-	4	6.9	6.8
656	Hydrot	7259	-	17	7.0	10.0
96	Hydro Cn Pd	1089			8.6	
401	Hyd Hnd Hnd	630			6.8	10.5
814	Hydrogen Trnd	5924	+	8	6.2	7.6
2375	South Steel	2675			3.6	14.3
489	South West	6074	+	3	6.7	6.7
5262	Thames	6074	+	10	6.2	7.9
529	Unit Outpost	5074	+	14	7.0	11.0
295	Vassess	3744	+	4	5.4	7.3
580	Vorobert	694	+	12	5.0	9.2

18	Atlantic Reconn	94%	..	24.1
95	Cable Intec	170	..	1.8 13.1
58	Country Odds	148 +	..	1.2 16.3
860	Director Hdp	2212 +	37%	2.3 ..
14	Frontpage	42%	1	..
92	Megafonics	59%	..	51.6

22%	Maloney Corp.	69 1/2	8	
25%	ONE English Pub	162	12	1.8 57 1/2
150%	Prince Rail	475	5	
520	Seafarer West	617 1/2		2.8 17.8
30	Southern Wools	67 1/2		3.5 15.0
125	Staver Pl Inn	380	15	0.7 ...
64	Stoddard	52	+	

Source: FT Information

M = Price at acquisition; W = % of stake; C = % of capital; D = % of debt; E = % of equity; S = % of sales; B = % of book value; F = % of face value; P = % of price; R = % of return; Y = % of yield; A = % of assets; L = % of liabilities; N = % of net worth; O = % of ownership; I = % of income; G = % of gross value; V = % of value; H = % of holdings; J = % of jobs; K = % of knowledge; Q = % of quality; T = % of time; U = % of units; X = % of exchange; Z = % of zone.

... of ... No significant ...
... in ... in the FIVE 100 ...

STOCK FUNDS										
1996			Funds		Ind. gr.		Gr. ind.		1996	
Range	Low	Stock	Fund	+/-	Ind. gr.	Gr. ind.	High	Low	High	Low
SHORTS (under 5 years)										
101%	102%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.36	6.46	1.25%	118%		
102%	103%	Fund 75-1325	100%		13.18	5.77	105%	121%		
103%	104%	Fund 75-1325	100%		10.43	1.13	110%	127%		
104%	105%	Fund 75-1325	100%		8.57	6.47	115%	132%		
105%	106%	Fund 75-1325	100%		14.08	5.08			110%	125%
106%	107%	Fund 75-1325	100%		9.46	6.67			115%	130%
107%	108%	Fund 75-1325	100%		7.72	6.72			120%	135%
108%	109%	Fund 75-1325	100%		15.78	6.78			125%	140%
109%	110%	Fund 75-1325	100%		10.88	6.88			130%	145%
110%	111%	Fund 75-1325	100%		11.01	6.81			135%	150%
111%	112%	Fund 75-1325	100%		9.00	7.01			140%	155%
112%	113%	Fund 75-1325	100%		11.01	7.01			145%	160%
113%	114%	Fund 75-1325	100%		11.01	7.01			150%	165%
114%	115%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			155%	170%
115%	116%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			160%	175%
116%	117%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			165%	180%
117%	118%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			170%	185%
118%	119%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			175%	190%
119%	120%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			180%	195%
120%	121%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			185%	200%
121%	122%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			190%	205%
122%	123%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			195%	210%
123%	124%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			200%	215%
124%	125%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			205%	220%
125%	126%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			210%	225%
126%	127%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			215%	230%
127%	128%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			220%	235%
128%	129%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			225%	240%
129%	130%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			230%	245%
130%	131%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			235%	250%
131%	132%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			240%	255%
132%	133%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			245%	260%
133%	134%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			250%	265%
134%	135%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			255%	270%
135%	136%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			260%	275%
136%	137%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			265%	280%
137%	138%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			270%	285%
138%	139%	Fund 75-1325	100%		6.14	6.67			275%	2

Reputation for Betterware

TODAY'S RACERS ON TELEVISION

and the phone FREE BET

THE CHASE

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BETTING

RACING: VERSATILE PERFORMER CAN DEFUSE UNGUIDED MISSILE'S ATTEMPT AT ASCOT DOUBLE

Inchcailloch puts reputation to test in Betterware Cup

By RICHARD EVANS, RACING CORRESPONDENT

THEY do not come much more down to earth than Jeff King, whose plain speaking has been the hallmark of a career which saw him ride more than 700 winners over jumps before turning successfully to training. Yesterday was no exception.

"I have always thought Inchcailloch was a decent horse and if he can't win off 10st 5lb then he's nothing out of the ordinary," he said, looking ahead to the Betterware Cup, a handicap chase, the feature race at Ascot today.

The remarkable Inchcailloch, who only two months ago won the Cesarewitch at Newmarket, has followed up with three chasing successes in the past six weeks, which have shown the seven-year-old to be one of the most progressive jumpers in training. "He's not beaten a lot but he couldn't have done it any better," King added. "At Ascot we'll find out whether he's the real thing."

In a competitive race, it is difficult to rule out most of his rivals with confidence, although Travado, Bradbury Star and Strong Medicine look up against it. Unguided Missile, last year's winner, has plenty of weight but is classed and remains a Cheltenham Gold Cup hope. Horses, who run well in the Hennessy

have a fine record in this race and Dextra Dove, a good fifth to Come Hill at Newbury, is well treated on his early season form last year.

Major Bell, who, along with Unguided Missile and Dextra Dove, will guarantee a strong pace, is a progressive second season chaser who ran particularly well behind Strong Promise here last month. He will appreciate the extra half-mile and ground conditions. Turning Trick is well weighted, judged on his victory at

Ascot.

Newcastle three weeks ago, but may just lack the class.

Go Ballistic, an Ascot specialist, finished 3½ lengths behind Inchcailloch here last time and is 10lb better off, so is weighted to reverse the form. He is best coming from off the pace and should have the race to suit, but his stable is out of form.

Although Inchcailloch has been on the go since June, he does not appear to be nearing the end of his tether and

ground conditions remain in his favour. King's matter-of-fact approach makes him the last to overrate his horses but he considered the King George VI Chase for his stable star last month. A Boxing Day appointment at Kempton may have to wait a year: in the meantime, Inchcailloch can complete a memorable double for King, who rode What A Buck to victory in this race 20 years ago.

Away from the gaze of the television cameras, Tim Easterby seems set for a profitable afternoon. Simply Dashing has looked one of the best novice chasers this season and can win his fourth race over fences at Ascot (2.35), while at Haydock, Shining Edge (1.20) and Good Vibes (2.30) hold solid claims.

The Uttrother chaser looks tricky, although I like Mimi-Lou-And (2.35), who should go off at rewarding odds. Henrietta Knight's consistent four-year-old has found two miles on the sharp side this term and should relish today's extra distance and easier surface.

At Lingfield, Silver Street (1.35) looks a class above her rivals on her third to Castle Sweep in the Tote Silver Trophy at Chesham and can give away the weight.

Nap: MIMI-LOU-AND
(2.35 Uttrother)

Next best: Inchcailloch
(2.20 Ascot)

Tringlot suited by ground

ASCOT

BBC1

1.10: Make A Stand is the clear front choice after his front-running success in the William Hill Hurdle at Sandown a fortnight ago and should oblige if he runs to within a stone of that effort. Bowditch Court won a maiden hurdle at Chesham but may not be suited by these faster conditions.

Supreme Charm is stepping back from three miles and will find it difficult keeping tabs on the favourite. Behanman Sunshine and Latahaab are useful recruits



TODAY'S RACES ON TELEVISION

from the flat but may appreciate a stiffer test of stamina.

1.45: Pleasure Shared returns to hurdling after falling over fences at Lingfield last week

and, according to the BHB official ratings, is more than a stone better over hurdles than his rivals. That may flatter him and in a tricky race I prefer Tringlot.

He disappointed behind What A Question on easy ground at Newbury last time but had previously beaten the Irish raider on a faster surface at Wetherby. Provided the ground remains fast, Blaze Away, who will relish the step up in trip, looks sure to run well.

2.20: see above.

RICHARD EVANS

Uttrother

Going soft
1.10 (2m 110yds) 1. Teleno Gold (R Dunwoody, 5-2), 2. Master Tides (10-13), 3. Asat (10-13), 4. Start Call (11-4), 5. 7m, 6. N.P. Albarino, 7. 11m, 8. P. Bradley, 9. 10-13, 10. 10-13, 11. 10-13, 12. 10-13, 13. 10-13, 14. 10-13, 15. 10-13, 16. 10-13, 17. 10-13, 18. 10-13, 19. 10-13, 20. 10-13, 21. 10-13, 22. 10-13, 23. 10-13, 24. 10-13, 25. 10-13, 26. 10-13, 27. 10-13, 28. 10-13, 29. 10-13, 30. 10-13, 31. 10-13, 32. 10-13, 33. 10-13, 34. 10-13, 35. 10-13, 36. 10-13, 37. 10-13, 38. 10-13, 39. 10-13, 40. 10-13, 41. 10-13, 42. 10-13, 43. 10-13, 44. 10-13, 45. 10-13, 46. 10-13, 47. 10-13, 48. 10-13, 49. 10-13, 50. 10-13, 51. 10-13, 52. 10-13, 53. 10-13, 54. 10-13, 55. 10-13, 56. 10-13, 57. 10-13, 58. 10-13, 59. 10-13, 60. 10-13, 61. 10-13, 62. 10-13, 63. 10-13, 64. 10-13, 65. 10-13, 66. 10-13, 67. 10-13, 68. 10-13, 69. 10-13, 70. 10-13, 71. 10-13, 72. 10-13, 73. 10-13, 74. 10-13, 75. 10-13, 76. 10-13, 77. 10-13, 78. 10-13, 79. 10-13, 80. 10-13, 81. 10-13, 82. 10-13, 83. 10-13, 84. 10-13, 85. 10-13, 86. 10-13, 87. 10-13, 88. 10-13, 89. 10-13, 90. 10-13, 91. 10-13, 92. 10-13, 93. 10-13, 94. 10-13, 95. 10-13, 96. 10-13, 97. 10-13, 98. 10-13, 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From royal decree to the dawn of Daly, choose the highlights from golf's rich history

Flag days that are part of fairway folklore

What are the best moments from golf's history? Not just the most recent, nor only those in professional golf with which we seem to be besotted at present, but the best moments anywhere, by anyone, at any time? It is a question of enormous complexity considering that golf has been enjoyed for centuries and is now played on every continent by men and women, amateurs and professionals.

As *The Times* golf correspondent, I have been asked to sit on a committee to compile a list of the 25 greatest moments in golf, and I would like to recruit readers to my cause. The word "moment" could mean a specific incident, such as Gene Sarazen's albatross on the 15th at Augusta National golf club in 1933, or it could mean the summer of 1930, when Bobby Jones, the amateur, won the Amateur and Open championships of both the United States and Great Britain.

The idea has come from the United States and Tom Watson is involved, which is appropriate, since he figures in some of them. The 25 greatest moments will be announced next month. One of the difficulties is that the memory tends to replay the more recent events — and there have been enough in the past 20 years to last a lifetime. In June 1969, before Tony Jacklin won the Open and began the revival of golf in Europe, would anybody have foreseen that Severiano Ballesteros would emerge to thrill the world with his attacking play, his brooding charisma or that his success would spark an upsurge among mainland continental European countries such as Spain, Sweden and Germany?

In those dim, pre-decimalisation days, nearly 30 years ago, would it have seemed possible that Europe-



John Hopkins enlists the help of readers in selecting the game's most precious memories

ans would take such a firm grip of the Masters or that the Ryder Cup would go from a one-sided competition to a biennial event of such importance that it ranks as one of the sporting occasions of that year, not one of golf's occasions? In 1969 it was inconceivable that, in June 1996, the Ryder, Walker and Curtis cups would all reside on this side of the Atlantic for only the second time this century.

Europe's victory in the 1995 Ryder Cup, Nick Faldo winning the Masters eight months ago, Great Britain and Ireland's defeat of the United States in the Walker Cup at Royal Portcullis last September, Ballesteros's exciting victory at St Andrews in



Daly's US PGA victory is worthy of inclusion

the 1984 Open; the thrilling drama that unfolded over the closing holes of the 1991 Ryder Cup at Kiawah Island. There are so many moments such as these, and yet the choice may come from any period in golf — not just this past quarter of a century.

The greatest single shot that I have seen was Ballesteros's three-wood from a bunker in the 1983 Ryder Cup, but, with a couple of honourable exceptions, shots per se rarely carry enough weight to make my list. Sad as it seems, therefore, I am not including Sandy Lyle's monumental seven-iron on the 72nd hole of the 1988 Masters, a shot from a bunker that set up his victory. Christy O'Connor's two-iron at The Belfry in the 1989 Ryder Cup, Watson's wonderfully lightened iron through the afternoon sun to win the 1983 Open, his fifth, or Costantino Rocca's enormous putt on the 18th green and its surrounds at St Andrews in the Open last year.

Some moments are so outstanding as to be indubitable. Jones, the amateur, in 1930 is not just one moment but may yet be named the moment in all golf. Ben Hogan winning three major championships in 1953 is another and a third was Jack Nicklaus conceding a short putt to Jacklin to tie the 1969 Ryder Cup.

Yet there might not have been professional golf as it is known today if there had not been an Open Championship in 1860. That was a significant moment, if ever there was one. So was the day when Francis Ouimet, an American amateur, beat Harry Vardon and Ted Ray, the two dominant professionals of the time,

25 GREAT MOMENTS IN GOLF

- 1338 James II of Scotland issues the famous decree that football and golf be utterly cried down and not used.
- 1567 Two weeks after the assassination of Lord Darnley, her husband, Mary Queen of Scots was out playing golf once again.
- 1860 The start of competitive golf with the staging of the first Open Championship, at Prestwick.
- 1870 Young Tom Morris's performance in covering the first 12 holes in 47 strokes, including an eagle three at the 578-yard 1st, of the Open at Prestwick, which he won by 12 strokes, averaging 74.5 for the two rounds.
- 1889 Freddie Tait's shot out of a bunker flooded to ankle depth on the 35th hole of the Amateur final against John Ball at Prestwick.
- 1913 Francis Ouimet beating Harry Vardon and Ted Ray in a play-off for the US Open.
- 1920 Joyce Wethered not being distracted by a passing train as she putted on the 17th hole of the English Amateur at Sheringham. "What train?" she said.
- 1921 Roger Wethered, the amateur and brother of Joyce, initially declining to compete in a play-off for the Open at St Andrews on the grounds that he had to compete in a village cricket match the next day.
- 1926 Bobby Jones's mashie shot from sandy waste on to the green of the 71st hole of the Open at Royal Lytham.
- 1930 Bobby Jones winning the Open and Amateur Championships of the US and Britain, what was known then as the Impegnable Quadrilateral.
- 1936 Gene Sarazen's albatross two on the 15th hole of the fourth round of the tournament that became known as the Masters.
- 1946 Byron Nelson's 11 consecutive victories and 18 in all.
- 1950 Ben Hogan winning the US Open 16 months after a severe car crash.
- 1953 Ben Hogan winning three of the game's four major championships.
- 1964 Babe Zaharias coming back after cancer to win the US Women's Open.
- 1960 Arnold Palmer winning the US Open with a last round of 65.
- 1960 Tony Jacklin winning the Open, beginning the revival of European golf.
- 1969 Jack Nicklaus conceding a short putt to Tony Jacklin to tie the Ryder Cup.
- 1975 Jack Nicklaus's 35-foot putt on the 70th hole of the Masters.
- 1977 Tom Watson beating Jack Nicklaus in the Open at Turnberry.
- 1979 Golfers from mainland Europe competing in the Ryder Cup, thus helping to spread the game throughout the Continent and marking the rise in standards of Europe in the biennial competition.
- 1982 Tom Watson chipping in on the 71st hole of the US Open.
- 1987 Europe's victory in the Ryder Cup, first in the US.
- 1987 Great Britain and Ireland's victory in the Walker Cup and first in the US.
- 1989 John Daly, ninth alternate, wins the US PGA championship.

to win the 1913 US Open. That launched the game in the United States, just as Jacklin's victory at Royal Lytham in the 1969 Open provided the impetus for the game to spread like wildfire throughout Britain.

Babe Zaharias coming back to win the US Women's Open after cancer in 1954 has to be included, as does Hogan winning the US Open 16 months after a severe car crash, but I have excluded three other

sentimental moments — Nicklaus's victory in the 1986 Masters, Crenshaw's in 1995 and Faldo's in 1996. Am I right or wrong? My 25 greatest moments in golf are given alongside. Send

yours to *Golf's Greatest Moments*, Sports Department, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London, E1 9XN. I will give a bottle of champagne to the reader who helps me most.

SKIING

Alphand strikes blow for France

By OUR SPORTS STAFF

LUC ALPHAND sped to victory in the men's World Cup downhill yesterday, becoming the first Frenchman to triumph in the Val Gardena World Cup downhill classic in Italy as the mighty Austrian ski machine ground to an abrupt halt.

Alphand, who has won the downhill World Cup for the past two years, clocked 1min 53.10sec to win the weather-delayed event, ahead of Atle Skarvald, of Norway (1min 53.25sec), and Kristian Ghedina, of Italy (1min 53.30sec).

Pietro Vitalini, Ghedina's compatriot, was fourth in 1min 53.34sec and Adrien Duval, another Frenchman, (1min 53.48sec), completed the top five.

The day was a big let-down for the Austrians, who have dominated the World Cup this season. After filling the top four places in the opening downhill, at Val d'Isere on Sunday, they had to settle for seventh to ninth with Werner Franz clocking 1min 53.88sec. Fritz Strobl, the winner on Sunday, doing 1min 53.93sec and Hans Knaus, the overall World Cup leader, coming home in 1min 53.99sec.

Patrick Ortlieb, who won the previous two races on the Salsong piste, in 1993 and 1995, was nowhere near a third success. He was seventeenth, nearly two seconds off the pace.

The race was stopped halfway through after Chad Fleischer, of the United States, crashed, although he walked away apparently unhurt.

The race was held despite falling snow, but was delayed for 75 minutes and the course was shortened by about 300 metres because of the conditions.

Alberto Tomba, of Italy, will not be racing in the World Cup giant slalom at Alta Badia tomorrow. Tomba, the triple Olympic champion, who came second behind Thomas Sykora, of Austria, on his season's debut at Madonna di Campiglio, still lacks race fitness after a bad fall in training in October.

Results, page 36

Atherton must be prepared to dust down an old acquaintance

THIS column brings news of great Christmas cheer for Michael Atherton, the England cricket captain. You may be having a nightmare in Zimbabwe, Atherton, but never fear: you will be having a merry reunion with old friends as soon as you reach the second leg of the tour, in New Zealand.

Guess who will be the match referee for the Kiwi Tests? Step forward your best pal and No 1 member of the Atherton fan club. Yes, I learn from my January copy of *Wisden Cricket Monthly* that it is good ol' Peter Burge.

Burge was in charge of the 1994 series in England against South Africa, which witnessed the most pathetically vindictive act in the brief history of the match referee system. Burge was seriously miffed when, after the notorious dirt-in-the-pocket business, Atherton was pre-emptively fined £2,000 by England team manager. So much so that Burge subsequently fined Atherton all by himself, for the heinous crime of looking slightly peeved at being given out, an offence which even *Wisden* described as "stepping minimally out of line".

Before you get started in NZ, Pete, did you know that Atherton, answering a questionnaire in some publication or other, named you as "the last person he would invite to his birthday party"?

Words of note

Peter Maxted, one of the most brilliant footballers I have



Burge will be keeping his eye on Atherton — and the ball

SIMON BARNES



On Saturday

played with (I have led a very sheltered life) writes to suggest that this column instigates a literary award for such organs as football match programmes. The first writer of the week, of them, is Neil Warnock, the Plymouth Argyle manager, for this Joycean opening paragraph: "Good afternoon and welcome to our first local derby of the season, even though we are only in October, having played Bristol Rovers previously our nearest rivals, Bristol City today come down and before the start of the season I am sure that City would have been one of the favourites to get promotion this season with their super stadium in Bristol and after a shaky start they have picked up one or two results of late and I know that today's game will be as difficult as any of our previous home matches where we have really struggled to score goals

however, the spirit has been very good and I was very, very delighted at Walsall to pick up maximum points even though I thought the scoreline of 1-0 did not reflect the superiority that we had that day, as I am writing these notes before the Bournemouth game I just hope we can continue our unbeaten run at Dean Court."

Real deal

Smirnoff vodka carried out a poll of 10,000 sports enthusiasts in the United States before offering their "Get Real" awards, given to the most star-struck of superstars. The basketballing Dennis Rodman got 26 per cent of the vote for complaining that his salary was insufficient; a mere £3 million a year hardly covers costs, after all. In second place came Dean Sanders, for turning up to a Dallas Cowboys training session in a custom-made Mercedes Benz golf cart.

In third place came the entire basketball Dream Team, for watching the Olympic procession of nations from an executive box before strolling down to join the rest of United States team five minutes before they entered the stadium.

Rough quotes

Who said this at the Olympic Games? 1. "They should take the critics out to the shooting venue and get rid of them." 2. "Perhaps she's just having a great meet... she maintains she was drug-free, but she swam faster than me." 3. "I will do it. I will. I will." 4. "If anybody sees me near a boat, they can shoot me." 5. "I don't stop being the world's best athlete because I lost one race." All these from the BBC Radio 5 Sports Yearbook 1997, edited by Peter Nichols and published by Oddball at £12.99. The essential work; the ideal last-second present.

Old bill

My search for a better name for the cricket-related pastime known as "one-day cricket" brings a response from R. H. Wright, late of Leathercrackers CC, suggesting a highly suitable "crackit". He is

also kind enough to enclose the club bar bill for the gathering that followed the Leathercrackers' encounter with Lee Wootton on September 19, 1996: 81 pints of mild ale @ 1/1; 20 pints of brown ale @ 1/2; 5 Guinness @ 1/10; 9 nourishing stouts @ 8d; 2 lemonades @ 4d; 5 1/2 pints of cider @ 1/10; 48 tots of rum @ 1/8; 24 tots of port @ 10d; 24 tots of sherry @ 1/10; 48 tots of Gordons gin @ 1/7; 18 tots of Irish whiskey @ 1/7; lime and peppermint 3/0. Total £17 19s 9d. There was also the princely sum of 7/11 spent on food, and 2/6 was given to "Mrs Wain", though the services she provided are not, perhaps wisely, here specified.



Leathercrackers also won the cricket match by three runs.

Still counting

Thanks to everyone who has contributed Magic Numbers. Recent offerings include a hard-butt fair 18 — for Durham County Cricket Club, of course. A bottle of ambrosial Nicolas Feuillatte champagne goes to all contributors who make the final count, to be published in the next few days. Any last-minute bubbly-worship thoughts will still reach me, if you fax them on 0171-762 5211.

Answers to quiz: 1. Bill Campbell, the highly responsible mayor of Atlanta. 2. Janet Evans, graceful loser to Michelle Smith. 3. Kerri Strug, before That Vault. 4. Steve Redgrave, of course. 5. Linford Christie, of course.

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THE TIMES GUIDE TO THE PREMIERSHIP THIS WEEKEND

ARSENAL

Can Stuart Pearce inspire Forest to rise above themselves, against an Arsenal team with no Tony Adams in defence or Patrick Vieira in midfield? Both are bound to be missed, but Martin Keown is fit again to replace Adams. Dennis Bergkamp returns to lend flair to the attack and Ian Wright, strangely subdued against Derby, will surely be sharper after a fortnight's rest. This is one game that Arsenal badly need to win to maintain an increasingly valid challenge for the championship. **BG**

ASTON VILLA

Cyber freaks of a claret-and-blue hue can now purchase the perfect Christmas stocking filler with the launch of the "ultimate CD ROM" interactive guide to Villa. It features, apparently, a unique view of the club, its glorious past, player profiles, a bulletin board and a "virtual" Villa section — all for £27.99. For those more in touch with the real world, and needing a fix of the pre-Yuletide hard stuff, Wimbledon should provide it as the visitors to Villa Park tomorrow. **RK**

BLACKBURN ROVERS

The cancellation of Middlesbrough's visit this afternoon enabled Tony Parkes to put off the decision to bring back Tim Flowers until Boxing Day; the move, though, is likely to confirm Shay Given's decision not to sign a new contract. "He's still having talks with the chairman, but he hasn't signed yet," Parkes said. "He wants first-team football, and he is going to be a top-line keeper. I think he'll see out his contract until the summer, then probably go." Sunderland lead the queue. **PB**

CHELSEA

Chelsea are without Frank Leboeuf and Dennis Wise, who are suspended, and Gianluca Vialli, who is injured, for the visit of their London rivals. Brushed aside at Leeds and Sunderland, they seem to perform only at home, but at least they now have Eddie Newton back in midfield while Rudd Oulit, if he again decides to play upfront, could threaten a West Ham defence whose parts are greater than the whole. Chelsea, though, badly need Di Matteo to recover his form. **BG**

COVENTRY CITY

Spirits are high at Highfield Road, after the midweek defeat of Newcastle United, but the biggest banana skin of them all, Woking, still lurks around the corner. Remember Sutton United? Coventry greeted the FA Cup third-round draw with about as much relish as a condemned man eating his last meal. "Oh god! Liam Daish, the City defender, yelped. His subsequent description of Clive Walker, the Woking striker, as a 'poor man's Peter Beardsley', should inspire the Surrey side. **RK**

DERBY COUNTY

Derby would have beaten Tottenham with half-decent finishing on Monday night. There is no question yet of Jim Smith splitting the partnership of Ward and Surridge up front, but they will face pressure if Marino Ramberg, Sweden's young player of the year, decides to accept the offer of a two-month loan spell at the Baseball Ground. He recently broke into his full national squad, but will spend the next fortnight on trial with Internazionale before giving Smith a yes or no. **RH**

EVERTON

John Scales's decision to join Tottenham after apparently agreeing terms at Elland Road left Leeds frothing; but Everton have not yet forgotten that Nigel Martyn did much the same when he went to Leeds in the summer. "I got the impression that he wanted to join us, but then the agent said 'We've got to go see Leeds before you sign,'" Cliff Finch, an Everton director, said yesterday, "and that was the last we saw of him." Everton will hope they do not see much of him in a starring role today. **PB**

LEEDS UNITED

Lucas Radebe is an unlikely popular hero, but the South African has emerged as one of the key players in George Graham's revamped line-up in his role as a man-marker. "He's been outstanding in that role," Graham said yesterday. "Look at the people he's marked — Zola, Le Tissier, Sheringham and McManaman, all international class." Radebe's next assignment may be Nick Barnby. Leeds may be able to be more positive soon, with Yeboah close to a comeback. **PB**

LEICESTER CITY

Pontus Kaarmark, the Sweden defender, could make his first starting appearance for 13 months as Martin O'Neill is forced to reshuffle his defence for the visit of Coventry this afternoon. He can expect a rousing reception at Filbert Street after a miserable year. Kaarmark damaged knee ligaments in his second game for the club, after a £840,000 move from Gothenburg, against Bolton last November. Injuries to Spencer Prior and Steve Walsh have opened the way for his return. **RK**

LIVERPOOL

Liverpool may have decided not to defend Neil Ruddock against the FA charge of bringing the game into disrepute, after his newspaper article attacking Alan Sugar, the Tottenham chairman, but that lack of support has not chastened the burly central defender. He took over as master of ceremonies at the Liverpool Christmas lunch at the training ground yesterday, leaving the journalists to stand out in the cold watching the jollities, the turkey and mince pies, inside. **PB**

MANCHESTER UNITED

Last year, a poor December did not prevent Manchester United from winning the double. This year, Alex Ferguson knows that his team cannot afford to slip up over the holiday period. "We cannot afford to give away points over Christmas this year," Ferguson said. "With our other commitments, we don't want to be playing catch-up in the Premiership over the second half of the season. We must not allow too big a gap to open up between ourselves and the teams above us." **wsPB**

MIDDLESBROUGH

With 19 professionals either injured or victims of a flu-type virus, today's game at Blackburn was postponed yesterday. The illness strikes at the end of a year in which Middlesbrough have won just five Premiership fixtures and during a run where they have gone 12 league games without victory. Meanwhile Bryan Robson, the manager, has Vladimir Kinder, from Slovakia, on trial along with Fabinho (cousin of the wayward Emerson), who may be retained as a reserve. **LT**

NEWCASTLE UNITED

Newcastle seem determined to rub shoulders with Europe's best. They could do with winning some silverware, though, and the home engagement against Liverpool on Monday is undoubtedly one of the pivotal fixtures. Disgusted by their defeat at Coventry this week, Kevin Keegan sat sulking on his own in the team bus. Two men central to the outcome are Alan Shearer and Neil Ruddock, his likely Liverpool marker, one of whose children has the Newcastle No 9 as godfather. **LT**

NOTTINGHAM FOREST

Pigs were reported flying over the City Ground yesterday when Irving Korn, the chairman, told journalists assembled for the unveiling of Stuart Pearce as caretaker-manager that the club was not, after all, in crisis. Just paper talk, he explained. Forest set a record this week after a sixteenth successive Premiership game without a win, sit bottom of the table, and are unable to move in the transfer market until the takeover is complete. It is time Korn realised the gravity of matters. **RH**

SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY

Wednesday's trip to Tottenham pits two of the league's more thoughtful tacticians, David Platt and Gerry Francis, against each other, and the latter will be mindful that Platt's men have already won at Newcastle and Liverpool. When Wednesday do well, the unsung Mark Pemberton often performs wonders in midfield, while Peter Atherton can prove a most attentive man-marker. That said, Des Walker's handling of Teddy Sheringham promises to be the duel of the match. **LT**

SUNDERLAND

Wearside women have voted Lionel Perez Sunderland's sexiest player. The goalkeeper apparently fancies a career as a film star, but, today, at Manchester United, his mind should be fully occupied by keeping Eric Cantona, another cult hero, at bay. The French pair were once team-mates at Nimes, and Perez said: "It will be great to see Eric again." He will need to be at his very best because Sunderland have not triumphed at Old Trafford for 29 years — not since the year Perez was born. **LT**

HOW THEY STAND

	P	Pts	Goal	Diff	Last five
1 Liverpool	18	37	+18		DWLWW
2 Arsenal	17	35	+18		LWWWD
3 Wimbledon	17	34	+13		DWWWW
4 Newcastle	17	30	+8		DLDL
5 Aston Villa	17	30	+7		LWWWW
6 Manchester Utd	17	28	+7		WDWDD
7 Everton	17	27	+9		DWLWW
8 Chelsea	17	25	-1		LDLWL
9 Sheffield Wed	17	25	-1		WDDWL
10 Tottenham	17	24	0		WLLWL
11 Derby	17	22	-1		WDWL
12 Leicester	17	21	-5		WLWL
13 Leeds	17	21	-5		WLWL
14 Sunderland	17	20	-4		LDWLW
15 West Ham	17	16	-7		DDLLS
16 Middlesbrough	17	15	-12		DLDDL
17 Blackburn	17	13	-8		DDWLL
18 Southampton	17	13	-8		LDLWL
19 Coventry	17	12	-12		LDLWL
20 Nottingham	17	10	-15		LDLWL

WEST HAM UNITED

Iain Dowie has long been the butt of terrace humour, and his own goal against Stockport County will not help, but no one can doubt his honesty — or his courage. It was revealed yesterday that Dowie had tried to play on and alone for his error on a broken right leg. He will be out for up to 12 weeks, but will be at Stamford Bridge today on crutches. "It was a bit foolish to try to stay on," he said, "but I will live with the mistake for years. There are no excuses. I said I'm sorry — that's all you can do." **KP**

WIMBLEDON

Sam Hammam took the players out last Monday for a seasonal celebration. "We've had a nice hard week to get it out of us," Robbie Earle, the midfielder, said after training. "It's competitive, but the boys enjoy it, and most stay on and do a bit extra. It's the sign of a happy club." A long, unbeaten, injury-free run helps, of course, and can overcome blips such as the fine of a week's wages imposed on Virnie Jones by his colleagues for injudicious remarks made to a newspaper last weekend. **NS**

Reporters: Brian Glanville, Peter Ball, Russell Kempson, Richard Hobson, Louise Taylor, Nick Szczepanski, Keith Pike, David Maddock. Statistics: Julian Desborough

BLACKBURN v MIDDLESBROUGH

TICKETS: Sold out
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-0, 1-1, 1-1, 2-1, 2-0, 1-2, 1-2

OFF

CHELSEA v WEST HAM

TICKETS: Sold out
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-0, 1-1, 1-1, 2-0, 2-2, 0-1, 2-2, 0-1

HOW THEY LINE UP
CHELSEA (from): Grodas, Hitchcock, Colgan, Petrescu, Phelan, Johnson, Sinclair, Clarke, Myers, Mirzo, Newton, Duberry, Di Matteo, Zola, Nichols, Gullit, Hughes
WEST HAM (from): Milosko, Breaker, Dicks, Williams, Potts, Bishop, Rasper, Raducanu, Rowland, Brown, Moncur, Dumrescu, Bowen, Hughes, Lampard, Bile, Portino, Mautoni, Sealey, Omoniyi, Hodges

EVERTON v LEEDS

TICKETS: Seats available
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-1, 1-0, 2-0, 1-1, 3-0, 2-0

HOW THEY LINE UP
EVERTON (from): Southall, Barnett, Hinchcliffe, Watson, Unsworth, Kanchelskis, Speed, Grant, Parkinson, Ferguson, Branch, Stuart, Short, Barry, Hottiger, Gerrard, Rieadout
LEEDS (from): Martyn, Kelly, Palmer, Beasley, Radebe, Halls, Lumsden, Flynn, Aspinovic, D Powell, C Powell, Ward, Surridge, Dally, Gabbidon, Williams, Taylor, Cansley, Yates, Carbon

LEICESTER v COVENTRY

TICKETS: Sold out
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-1, 2-0, 0-0, 3-0, 0-2, 0-2, 1-3, 3-1, 1-0

HOW THEY LINE UP
LEICESTER (from): Keller, Grayson, Watts, Prior, Keamark, Marshall, Jozet, Lennon, Parker, Clardige, Taylor, Heskey, Campbell, Wilson, Poole, Lawrence, Lewis
COVENTRY (from): Ogrizovic, Teller, Daish, Dublin, Shaw, Williams, Richardson, McAllister, Salako, Whelan, Huckerby, Jess, Borrowes, Boland, Gernaux, Flan

MANCHESTER UNITED v SUNDERLAND

TICKETS: Sold out
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-1, 2-0, 0-0, 3-0, 0-2, 0-2, 1-3, 3-1, 1-0

HOW THEY LINE UP
MANCHESTER UNITED (from): Schmeichel, G Neville, May, Palfister, Irwin, Johnsen, Butt, Scholes, Cantona, Solskjaer, Giggs, Beckham, P Neville, McClair, Poborsky, van der Gouw
SUNDERLAND (from): Perez, Hall, Kubicki, Melville, Ord, Kelly, Ball, Bracewell, Rae, Gray, Russell, Agnew, Stewart, Aston, Bridges, Prosser

NOTTINGHAM FOREST v ARSENAL

TICKETS: Seats available
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-0, 0-1, 1-4, 1-2, 0-2, 3-2, 0-1, 2-2, 0-1

HOW THEY LINE UP
NOTTINGHAM FOREST (from): Croxall, Lytle, Pearce, Cooper, Warner, Phillips, Haarland, Woon, Allen, Saunders, Howe, Campbell
ARSENAL (probable): Lukic, McGowan, Keown, Ungrah, Bould, Winterburn, Gards, Merson, Platt, Bengkamp, Wright, Subs: Harrison, Shaw, Morrow, Parfior, Bartram

SOUTHAMPTON v DERBY

TICKETS: Seats available
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-2, 0-0, 2-1, 0-1, 1-1, 1-1

HOW THEY LINE UP
SOUTHAMPTON (from): Beasant, Dryden, Lundelovam, Macdonald, Berkovic, Magilton, Oskley, Slater, Ostenszad, Watson, Potter, Monkou, Benall, Hughes, Nelson
DERBY COUNTY (from): Hoult, Powell, McGrath, Simace, Lumsden, Flynn, Aspinovic, D Powell, C Powell, Ward, Surridge, Dally, Gabbidon, Williams, Taylor, Cansley, Yates, Carbon

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR v SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY

TICKETS: Seats available
10-YEAR RECORD: 1-1, 2-0, 0-0, 3-0, 0-2, 0-2, 1-3, 3-1, 1-0

HOW THEY LINE UP
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR (from): Walker, Carr, Campbell, Fox, Caddenwood, Wilson, Howells, Nielsen, Dossel, Sinton, Sheringham, Iversen, Scales, Allen, Nethercott, Rosenthal, Bardsen
SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY (from): Pressman, Nolan, Nicol, Atherton, Walker, Stelanovic, Penbridge, Whittingham, Hyde, Carbone, Booth, Hirst, Blinker, Clarke, Oakes, Trustfull, Humphreys, Donaldson, Ungrah

LEADING SCORERS

13: Ian Wright (Arsenal)
18: Alan Shearer (Newcastle), Robbie Fowler (Liverpool)
12: Fabrizio Ravanelli (Middlesbrough)
8: Matthew Le Tissier (Southampton), Dwight Yorke (Aston Villa), Ekan Eloku (Wimbledon), Gianluca Vialli (Chelsea)
7: Les Ferdinand (Newcastle)

CHAMPIONSHIP BETTING
6-4: Liverpool, 11-4: Arsenal, 7-2: Manchester United, 9-2: Newcastle, 15-1: Aston Villa, 25-1: Wimbledon, 25-1: Everton, 33-1: Chelsea, 125-1: Tottenham Hotspur. Odds supplied by Ladbrokes

The official Internet site of the FA Carling Premiership is at <http://www.facarl.com/>

ASTON VILLA v WIMBLEDON

TICKETS: Seats available
10-YEAR RECORD: 0-0, 0-1, 0-3, 1-2, 2-1, 1-0, 0-1, 7-1, 2-0

HOW THEY LINE UP
ASTON VILLA (from): Bonnici, Oakes, Nelson, Wright, Scimeca, Staunton, Gards, Merson, Platt, Bengkamp, Wright, Subs: Joachim, Johnson, Tiler, Hendrie, Farrelly
WIMBLEDON (from): Sullivan, Cunningham, Blackwell, Perry, Kimble, Ardley, Earle, Jones, Fear, Hoddinott, Leonardson, Gayle, Eklou

NEWCASTLE v LIVERPOOL

TICKETS: Sold out
10-YEAR RECORD: 0-2, 1-2, 2-2, 1-1, 3-0, 1-1, 2-1

HOW THEY LINE UP
NEWCASTLE (from): Smizek, Watson, Peacock, Albert, Elliot, Gillespie, Lee, Beardsley, Glinda, Shearer, Ferdinand
LIVERPOOL (from): James, Wright, Matteo, Ruddock, Babb, McNeill, Thomas, Barnes, Spence, McManaman, Collymore, Fowler, Borge

WHEN TO WATCH ON TELEVISION

Today
10.40pm BBC 1 Match of the Day (Highlights)
Tomorrow
11.00am Sky Sports Goals of the Day
4pm Sky Sports Ford Escort Super Sunday
Aston Villa v Wimbledon (Free)
Monday
8pm Sky Sports Ford Escort Monday night football
Newcastle v Liverpool (Free)



Shilton, the Peter Pan of football, plays his thousandth league match tomorrow. "In that critical second in the striker's mind, he looks as unpassable as King Kong."

Goalkeeping legend in a league of his own

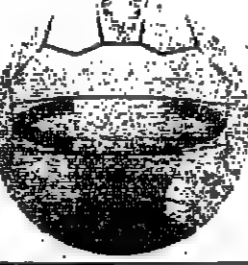
The queues for the signature of Peter Leslie Shilton were longer than for Santa's grotto, which says something for the enduring attraction of England's oldest active professional footballer, as well as the proper priorities of Christmas shoppers at the Lakeside centre in Essex. After all, it is not every day that the dash from Marks & Spencer to Pizza Hut is blocked by a footballing legend: 1,000 league games, come Leyton Orient's home match against Brighton tomorrow afternoon, 47 years, 125 England caps.

About 100 strong for the whole hour, the line shuffled slowly towards the familiar, dark figure hunched over a desk piled high with postcards. Shilton took trouble over each request, engaged in endless small talk and conducted himself with the professionalism that has marked his playing career. His hands are surprisingly delicate and undamaged, considering the sort of punishment a library of great strikers have given them over the past 30 years, but the pen still seemed as small as a pin in his fist.

"David Seaman? You should have seen this bloke," a father chided his son. "Seaman wouldn't have a look-in if Shilton had been in his prime." Shilton looked on benignly, considering the compliment, then turned a weary eye to the next in line, a West Ham United

PETER SHILTON

THE FACE OF FOOTBALL



By Andrew Longmore

fan, who remembered Shilton from his Leicester City days and had been cursing him ever since. Briefly, they swapped memories.

"Who was that bloke... dark-haired, stocky, striker who used to play for you way back?" Shilton asked. They settled on Brian Dear. "I remember a game we had in my early days. West Ham hardly got a kick, but about five minutes from the end he nicked one past me, went in off the post." After all these years, it still hurts. "Any goal that gets past me, for club or country, I treat as a personal disaster," he confided

once. There have been fewer than most, on the field at least.

Satisfied, the signed photograph in hand, the West Ham man retreats, wishing Shilton luck for tomorrow. "He's done us a few times, he has," he said, turning back for a final look. "Remember that cup game against Stoke when he saved that penalty from Hurst? No idea to this day how he did that." He shook his head in the manner of so many thwarted strikers down the years. "One of the greatest, you know." Who was the photo for? "Me son, he's 32." He was two when Shilton made his first Football League appearance, against Everton, at the age of 16. Leicester won 3-0.

In the background, Barry Hearn, who has lured Shilton from West Ham's reserves and back into first-team football with Orient, looks on like a doting grandfather. His hair has not weathered as well as Shilton's. "He's only a year younger than me and his stretching routine makes me feel tired," he said. "I swapped Les Sealey for him three weeks ago, the best piece of business I've done in years. He made six world-class saves against Bury and we got a point. The thing is we don't have to worry about our end any more. We just have to score in theirs."

Brian Clough said much the same when Nottingham Forest

SHILTON'S RECORD			MOST LEAGUE APPEARANCES	
League games	Other	Total	999:	Peter Shilton
LEICESTER CITY	286	40	824:	Terry Paine
STOKE CITY	110	11	797:	Tommy Hutchinson
NOTTINGHAM FOREST	302	70	782:	Robbie James
SOUTHAMPTON	188	54	777:	Alan Oakes
DERBY COUNTY	175	36	770:	John Trollope
PLYMOUTH ARGYLE	34	9	764:	Jimmy Dickinson
BOLTON WANDERERS	1	0	762:	Roy Spradon
LEYTON ORIENT	3	0	758:	Billy Bonds
	999	220	758:	Ray Clemetide

won the championship, straight up from the second division, in 1978 and Shilton kept 25 clean sheets. "He cost me £270,000 and he was worth every penny." Clough wrote in his autobiography. "A good goalkeeper can save you 18 points a season and he was a class act."

These days, you start negotiating with goalkeepers at about 6ft 3in. "The bigger the better," seems to be the motto. Shilton lacked height, but not width. In that critical split second in the striker's mind, he looked as unpassable as King

Kong. Peter Withe, the centre forward in the championship sides of both Forest and Aston Villa, had a better record than most against his old team-mate. "He always had a thing about being bigger than he is," he said. "At the top of his game, he gave the impression he was 6ft 2in or 6ft 3in, but in fact he was just about 6ft in his boots. He was just so agile and he worked so hard."

"At Forest, he used to pull off save after save, and we would be thinking: 'Flipping heck, he's turn-

failings. The list of his off-field misdemeanours is as long as his collection of clubs — Orient is his eleventh — and almost as varied. But self-belief travelled with him every step of the way. He still harbours a quaint dream that he might play in the Premiership again. Probably not with Leyton Orient.

What was so strange about Shilton was that his extraordinary sense of discipline dissolved the moment he crossed the white line back to reality. He was as profligate off the field as he was miserly on it. He won his battle with alcohol, but his domestic life kept the tabloids in headlines and he is still laden with debt. A chat with the great man this week cost about 25p a league game.

Back at the Lakeside, a pale young man with a bad cough stands in the miniature goal, fielding shots from passing children. Luke Weaver, Orient's reserve goalkeeper, 17, has had his immediate ambitions blocked by the arrival of the newcomer, but every Monday and Thursday he trains and listens and watches, aware that this is a priceless investment in his future. "I used to go down to Wadford with Peter Bonetti, but this is better," he said. "He still works hard and his reflexes are still sharp. Not a bad guy to be dropped for, eh?"

Middlesbrough in dock over postponement

By Peter Ball

THESE are bad days for Middlesbrough. As if errant Brazilians and a leaky defence did not offer problems enough, injuries and a viral epidemic yesterday persuaded them to postpone this afternoon's away game against Blackburn Rovers, and they will face an FA Premier League disciplinary hearing in the new year.

Mike Lee, the FA Premier League spokesman, said in a statement: "The FA Premier League had no discretion to approve such a postponement, and the rules clearly state that a club is obliged to fulfil its fixture obligations." Understandably, Blackburn reacted angrily to Middlesbrough's unilateral decision.

"This is a big decision now for the Premier League," Tom Finny, the Blackburn secretary, said yesterday. "I can understand that smaller clubs sometimes can't field a team, but in these days of £20 million turnovers, and multimillion pound teams, you should have squads to cope with such eventualities. It is a huge issue of the Premiership's credibility."

Middlesbrough have 17 players fit, although three are goalkeepers and five are young players not yet in the first team squad. In their present predicament, without a Premiership win in 12 games, they clearly felt that that is not enough.

"We could not have done ourselves justice," Bryan Robson, the Middlesbrough manager, said yesterday. "I would have had to include six debutants, and that would not have been fair to anyone. Not one of those players are over 20 years of age."

Middlesbrough's reluctance to play in those circumstances, with Juninho, Pearson, Vickers, Fleming, Stamp and Moore among the injured, Beck and Whyte among the flu sufferers, can be understood, but it is hard to avoid the

feeling that that is the luck of the draw. "It would be unfair to the playing public to go ahead," Robson claimed; but the Blackburn public, the majority of the expected crowd, might not agree.

Certainly, with Middlesbrough on a bad run, and Blackburn improving, the home club officials were eager for the game to be played. "We've got a huge game on Boxing Day against Newcastle," Finny said, "and now this puts even extra pressure on that one, because we could be in the bottom three through no fault of our own."

Blackburn's unhappiness was not helped by not learning of the postponement officially from the Premier League office until after the supporters had heard on the lunchtime news.

With no provision for the League to grant a postponement, Middlesbrough have been charged with a breach of regulations and will face a disciplinary hearing. The disciplinary panel, by contrast, has wide discretionary powers, and could do anything from finding that there were extenuating circumstances for Middlesbrough's action to fining the club, deducting points, or indeed awarding the match to Blackburn. "If the



Robson: reluctant to play

Premier League starts talking about just financial penalties. I'm sorry, but that just isn't sufficient," Finny said.

With Liverpool and Newcastle United meeting at St James' Park on Monday, there is an opportunity today for Arsenal, Manchester United and Everton to make things even tighter at the top. Aston Villa and Wimbledon will meet tomorrow in the only other game between two of the leading clubs.

A visit from Arsenal is usually the last thing that a club in turmoil wants, but Stuart Pearce may regard today being as good a time as any to face them. Injuries and suspensions mean that Arsenal will be without Dixon and Adams from their back five and Vieira from midfield. Bergkamp and Keown return, and Remi Garde, Arsène Wenger's other French signing, stands by to make his debut in Vieira's place.

Manchester United face Sunderland at Old Trafford, knowing that their Premiership credentials are on the line, with Alex Ferguson warning that they cannot afford to slip any further behind. At full strength they are probably the strongest team in the league, but the injuries to Keane and Cole have left them looking less than totally convincing.

Keane, however, has begun jogging and is expected to make his comeback on New Year's Day and Cole will play in a rearranged reserve match on Monday. They cannot return too quickly for United.

West Ham United go to Chelsea without their striker, Iain Dowie, whose unhappy week was complete yesterday when it was confirmed that he had broken an ankle in the Coca-Cola Cup tie at Stockport on Wednesday as well as scoring an own goal. West Ham have taken Mike Newell, the Birmingham City forward, on loan

Repentant Weah says moment of madness will never be repeated

ROB HUGHES



Weekend View

George Weah, is unarguably a model of his time. He is already the 1996 world, European and African footballer of the year. He has since crafted perhaps the finest goal in the history of the game, running from his own penalty box through seven gentlemen of Verona to finish with incomparable athleticism, breathtaking composure. And, when the new year polls are counted, either he, Alan Shearer, or Ronaldo, the astonishing young Brazilian of Barcelona, will be next year's world No 1.

Imagine, then, George Weah writing the most humbling of letters to Fifa, the world governing body of his game.

"I am writing to you to apologise for the unfortunate situation that occurred in Porto," he began his letter two days ago to Sepp Blatter, the Fifa general secretary. "Please extend my deepest regrets to Fifa and the entire football body for the situation, especially since you chose to give me the Fair Play Award for 1996."

"You have given me the greatest honour and because of a moment of craziness through provocation, I have caused you embarrassment. I have always viewed football as a sport for unification for now and for tomorrow — unification in the sense of bringing people together — and that concept will always remain in my head through my career and after."

It was because of the way in which Weah used his head — lost it, in fact — that he was having now to craft such an apology. On November 20 Weah broke the nose of Jorge Costa, the Porto defender, with a savage butt in the tunnel after a Champions League match. AC Milan, who pay Weah's wages, audaciously tried to tell the world that nothing significant had taken place. Weah, his wife and other witnesses maintained that the headbutt was a

reaction to serious foul play perpetrated against Weah by Costa in both meetings of the teams and, Weah still insists, severe racial taunting from the Portuguese.

Uefa added five more matches to Weah's one-match suspension this week. However, the governing body of European football did not take action against Costa. Rene Eberle, the disciplinary committee secretary, said that there was no proof of the alleged racial remarks.

The decision has enraged not only Weah's family but also the minister for sport and youth in Liberia, his homeland. "I am appalled, sad-

dened, dismayed," Francois Massaquoi said this week. "They are punishing Weah, but what are they going to do with Costa? Are they not going to punish him because he is a white boy?"

Oh dear. The politician furthers his intervention by speculating that Uefa and Fifa have concocted the punishments so that they can avoid giving an African the prestigious award for the second year running. How one wishes that the politician, particularly one from a land which had ostracised Weah until his fame became so beneficial, had kept quiet.

In fact, almost the opposite has happened. Weah was given the award last year, when he won little of import, precisely because it was a fallow year in the sport and a gesture towards the rising continent of the game could be made.

Moreover, Joao Havelange, stubbornly proving that, at 80, he remains a law unto himself, said last week: "Fifa has selected the Liberian [Weah] for its fair-play award and will not change that decision. A gesture cannot cancel out ten years of fair play everywhere and in every competition."

When it was suggested to Havelange that Weah's

assault on Costa was premeditated, the Fifa overlord retorted: "Nonsense."

So, while there is proof that one of the greatest players in the game committed common assault on an aggressive opponent, the judgments suggest that, if Costa were to follow through his threat to take Weah to court, the defence would be very thin. And the game, inevitably, would suffer.

If there was racism, it should be condemned. Uefa failed appallingly to deal with this during Euro 96, when Hristo Stoichkov, of Bulgaria, admitted that he had used racist remarks to taunt Marcel Desailly, of France. "Everyone does it," Stoichkov said.

No sir, they do not. But it is a sad reflection on the most popular game played on earth that men will stoop to such methods, methods of cheats and big boys. And the response within football has been nowhere near universal for example, Hussein Ali, of Kuwait, has been suspended for a year and fined 5,000 Swiss francs (£2,500) by Fifa for verbally abusing and spitting at a referee.

We have, sadly, come an awful long way from the days of Tom Finney and Pele — men who would be colourblind so far as their race is concerned. They have respect for their game, for one another, and Finney spoke of "ambassadors" yesterday. So does Weah in his letter.

"The situation will never happen again. I will make it my special duty to teach youngsters coming up in the football world that, even though temptation exists at times within the game, fighting is not the solution. I will never make you ashamed of me again. I will always be grateful for all you have done to uplift my career."

He signed himself: "George Weah, Liberia Sports Ambassador."

When it was suggested to Havelange that Weah's

assault on Costa was premeditated, the Fifa overlord retorted: "Nonsense."

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Samaranch plays down Fifa threat to withdraw

By OUR SPORTS STAFF

JUAN Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee, said yesterday that he was not worried by a threat to withdraw football from the Olympic Games.

"There hasn't really been any danger that the sport could disappear from the Olympics," Samaranch said.

Samaranch was responding to comments by Joao Havelange, the president of Fifa, football's world governing body, who criticised the sport's role in the Olympics and the organisation of the Atlanta tournament.

Havelange had said that football had gained nothing financially from the Atlanta Games and could be pulled out of the Olympics if it continued to be "marginally allied".

Officials in Abu Dhabi yesterday defended the quality of football on display at the Asian Cup in response to a report, being prepared for Fifa, that is critical of the standard. The early draft of the report, prepared by a leading Western coach, suggests that Asian football is not progressing and is critical of the performances of South Korea and Japan in the cup.

"We know about the report and we are expecting it soon after the end of the tournament," Jurg Nepper, head of Fifa's technical department in Zurich, said yesterday.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has been especially upset over the criticism of South Korea and Japan, who will co-host the 2002 World Cup. "The AFC has nothing to fear where the quality of football is concerned as demonstrated by the excellent performances of Japan and Korea at the Atlantic Olympics and by Korea and Saudi Arabia at the 1994 World Cup," Peter Velappan, secretary of the AFC, said.

Weah in action for AC Milan against Porto last month

Johnnie Walker 1550



RUGBY UNION 34

Bath looking to rise above internal strife

SPORT

SATURDAY DECEMBER 21 1996

GOLF 35

Can you help to pick the game's greatest moments?



Crawley forms strong alliance with vice-captain to force Zimbabwe onto defensive

Hussain puts England in driving seat

FROM SIMON WILDE IN BULAWAYO

BULAWAYO (third day of five): England, with six first-innings wickets in hand, are 70 runs behind Zimbabwe

THERE is sometimes a fine line between success and failure and Nasser Hussain tipped along it precariously on the third day of the first Test at Queens Club here yesterday.

The England vice-captain turned the first ball he faced, from Paul Strang, down off his hip and saw it slip through the fingers of Stuart Carlisle crouched three feet away at short leg. Had the catch stuck, England would have been 92 for three in reply to Zimbabwe's 376. They would have been on the run. Instead Hussain stayed — and stayed and stayed. For the next five hours he battled away, withstanding the loss of two partners in disheartening fashion to claw England back into the match. At the start of play, bookmakers had judged them to be 20-1 outsiders, yet at stumps yesterday they were in a position from which they may well yet, sometime tomorrow, force a win.

Shortly before the close Hussain reached a richly deserved century and will resume this morning with England on 306 for four, his own innings worth 101 and his partnership with John Crawley worth 126. Crawley having played beautifully for three hours for his 51. With the pitch turning, England need to bat well today to build a substantial lead and give themselves a realistic chance of beating opponents whose temperaments they have reason to believe are suspect under pressure.

The most encouraging aspect of the batting of Hussain and Crawley, neither of whom

was in the England side when it last played a Test overseas, was their willingness to graft in unfavourable conditions, knowing also that after them there is little batting to come. With the pitch having less life in it than expected, the ball did not come on to the bat and, with the fields spread, there was no option but to chisel out the runs.

As expected, the main threat to England's well-being came from Strang, the promising Zimbabwe leg spin bowler, who was never treated with anything less than respect. He took two of the three wickets to fall yesterday as England advanced their score to 238 and caused Hussain, who admitted to not being able to read Strang every time, to twice more tiptoe along the thin line

Simon Barnes 35

before a third century in six Tests was his.

Twice after reaching his half-century Hussain narrowly escaped. The first time he swept within inches of Houghton, who spent some of the day off the field with back trouble, and the second time spooned an attempted pull over the head of Whittall, who might have moved more quickly at mid-on.

Crawley, on the other hand, appeared to pick Strang every time, confirming his reputation as the best player of leg spin in the England side alongside Atherton. He has given the impression on this tour that he is on the brink of transforming himself from a batsman of promise into one of real stature.

The only other bowler seriously troubling England was

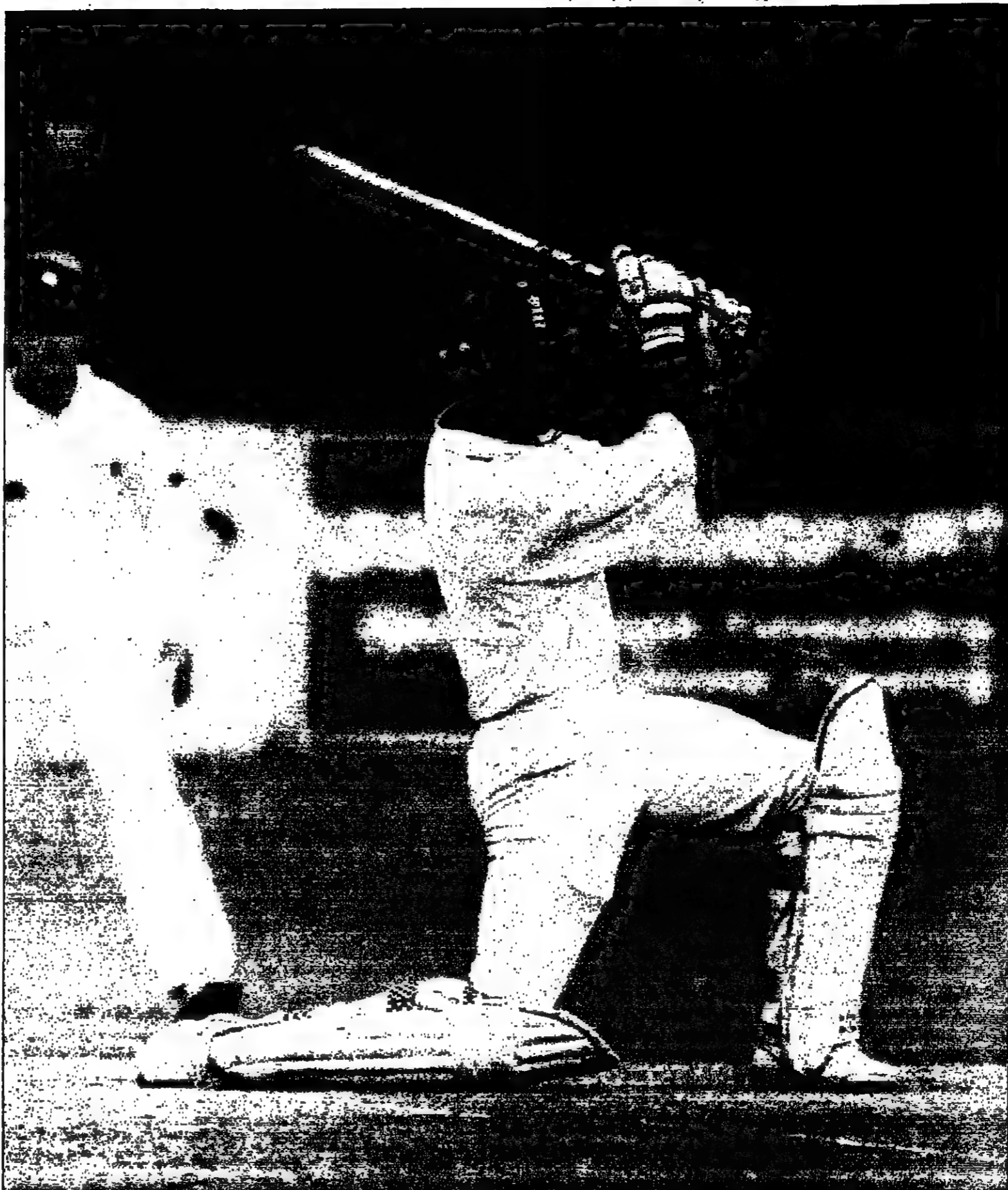
Streak, who began the day with a disappointing spell but returned later to better effect, especially with the new ball 80 minutes before the close. But he lacks the vitality that brought him so many wickets in the past two years and there is no reason why Hussain and Crawley should not carry on in the same vein today.

That England were in trouble earlier in the day was not all of their own making. The second wicket to fall, which left them precariously placed at 160 for three — which soon became 180 for four — was the result of a most unfortunate blunder by Ian Robinson, the home umpire, who is not having a happy match.

Stewart was on the receiving end and will rue his ill luck all the more as he had spent the morning playing himself in and began the afternoon brightly, he and Hussain scoring freely against Bryan Strang and Olonga. To stem the flow of runs, Paul Strang was recalled and in his first over Stewart, on 48, pushed his left leg down the pitch and missed an attempted sweep. The ball, a leg break, struck Stewart's pad in line with off stump and arguably would have not only gone on to miss that stump but also another entire set as well.

It was the third questionable decision Robinson has made, the two earlier ones having worked to England's advantage. Waller was adjudged caught at short leg on the first day off a ball that appeared to hit only his pad. And 30 minutes into play yesterday Knight was reprieved on 48 when he misread Paul Strang's googly and was struck on his back pad. Knight was showing less enterprise than he had the previous afternoon and fell for the addition of only eight more runs, leg-before to Olonga's slower ball. Olonga is only 20 years of age and a new operator, but this was a fine ball that swung late and beat Knight comprehensively.

Stewart's unfortunate departure was soon followed by that of Thorpe, who could have no complaint about the manner of his going. He was the victim of perhaps Strang's best ball of the day, a googly that bamboozled him completely, beat Andy Flower, the Zimbabwe wicketkeeper, but not the diving Campbell at first slip. It leaves Thorpe more out of form than ever with 143 runs to his name from eight tour innings.



Hussain plays powerfully through the covers during his century for England at Queens Club yesterday. Photograph: Stu Forster/Allsport

BULAWAYO SCOREBOARD

ZIMBABWE First Innings 376 (A Flower 112, A D R Campbell 84).

ENGLAND First Innings

N V Knight lbw b Olonga 56

(104min, 79 balls, 9 fours)

*M A Atherton lbw b P A Strang 16

(57min, 35 balls, 2 fours)

+A J Stewart lbw b P A Strang 46

(149min, 123 balls, 8 fours)

N Hussain not out 101

(313min, 244 balls, 13 fours)

G P Thorpe c Campbell b P A Strang 13

(25min, 23 balls, 3 fours)

J P Crawley not out 51

(183min, 153 balls, 7 fours)

Extras (b 4, lb 2, w 1, nb 14) 21

Total (4 wickets, 108 overs, 418min) 306

R D B Croft, D Gough, A D Mullaly, C E W Silverwood and P C R Tunnell to bat

FALL OF WICKETS: 1-48 (Knight 29), 2-92 (Stewart 14), 3-190 (Hussain 24), 4-180 (Hussain 31)

BOWLING: Streak 23-4-59-0 (nb 8; 7 fours, 8-2-11-0, 3-1-21-0, 8-2-8-0, 3-0-7-0, 5-1-5-0); B C Strang 17-5-84-0 (nb 2; 7 fours, 6-0-0-0, 5-0-20-0, 7-5-11-0); P A Strang 37-10-85-3 (12 fours, 14-4-25-1, 20-5-48-2, 3-0-12-0); Olonga 17-1-72-1 (nb 7; w 1; 10 fours, 1-0-1-0, 6-1-22-1, 5-0-34-0, 5-0-15-0); Whittall 7-2-19-0 (4 fours; one spell); G W Flower 7-3-20-0 (2 fours; one spell)

SCORING NOTES (third day): Lunch: 129-2 (43 overs, 170min, Stewart 28, Hussain 12). Tea: 231-4 (76 overs, 209min; Hussain 81, Crawley 19). Second new ball: 251-4 (88 overs) at 3.30pm.

Umpires: R S Dune (New Zealand) and I D Richardson (Third umpire: R B Tiffin).

Match referee: Hanuman Singh (India).

TEST TO COME: Second (Harare) December 26 to 30.

Compiled by Bill Frindall

PHOTOGRAPHS: ROSS KINNAIRD / ALLSPORT



Pearce faces the press on his first day in charge

Pearce agrees to tackle his hardest task yet

BY RICHARD THOMSON

STUART PEARCE has never been one to shirk a challenge, but yesterday he took on what he acknowledges is the biggest test of his football career, when he agreed to become caretaker-manager of Nottingham Forest.

That Pearce should succeed Frank Clark is not exactly a surprise, because at the City Ground he was always seen as the heir apparent. He was recommended to the club's board of directors by Clark, just as Clark had been favoured by Brian Clough three years ago. Nobody, however, could have foreseen the perilous circumstances in which Pearce, 34, would take charge.

The problems he faces are immense, with the side bottom of the FA Carling Premiership and the future ownership of the club thrown into new doubt on Thursday night when one of the two consortiums attempting to win the support of shareholders withdrew their takeover bid in the wake of Clark's resignation.

Pearce, already player, captain and Professional Footballers' Association represent-

ive, said that he will consider whether to stay on in a managerial role in the middle of January, and will not do so if he believes that the extra responsibility is affecting his play. Unlike Bryan Robson, Gordon Strachan and, to a lesser extent, Ruud Gullit, he said that he is still a footballer first and manager second. Nor will he relinquish willingly his place in the England squad, even though Glenn Hoddle had to force him out of temporary retirement after the European championship finals in the summer.

Alan Hill, Clark's assistant, will undertake the paperwork and the club's business negotiations will be conducted by Irving Korn, the chairman, pending the takeover.

It is, nevertheless, a huge workload, even for a man of such unwavering commitment as Pearce, but he will attempt to tackle it head on. He commands so much authority at the City Ground that Fred Reacher, the former chairman, said at a testimonial dinner in the player's cause earlier this year that Pearce had a "job for life" at the club. "I think you will find that he

had drunk a few glasses of wine when he said that," Pearce said yesterday.

For a man often described as an inspirational leader, Pearce is not renowned for his eloquence. He is the archetypal player's player and his public relations skills will undergo close scrutiny over the coming weeks. Yesterday, dressed in a black turtle-neck

sweater, jeans and desert boots, he gave a frank, downbeat assessment of the task ahead, before revealing that he had secured the loan signing of Nigel Clough, from Manchester City, for a month.

"I am sure that Frank would have liked to have signed five or six players, but there is no money available so he had to work with the players he had

already and it is the same for me now," Pearce said. "It remains to be seen if these players are good enough. I have asked them for 100 per cent effort and respect."

"They might think I am an easy option because I have been one of them, but things will have to be a bit different now. I admit I know very little about management. To be

honest, I have not got a clue whether I will enjoy it, or be any use. But I do know that your friends become very few and far between."

There was also a moment of vintage Pearce. Asked why Nigel Clough, back where he enjoyed the best days of his career, would not be selected for the home game against Arsenal this afternoon, he glared at his inquisitor and replied sternly: "Because I said so."

That is the role model — the tough guy, the one-time electrician who made good — whom supporters know and love. This afternoon he will sprint towards the Trent End and acknowledge the cries of "Psycho, Psycho" by letting out a manic scream of "Come on!" He will clench his fists and raise his arms, his face contorted in passion. There cannot be a greater empathy between any player and his club in English football. The odds are stacked against Pearce, but he will not fall alone.

Premiership guide, page 38
Shilton's grand day, page 39
Weekend view, page 39



More animated, he conducts training with the players who must now call him "boss"

GRRR AHA MMM'S PORT

Just roll it round your tongue.





Wrap up
in style
to go to
the party
shopping • 3

THE TIMES

weekend

Champagne
prize
Jumbo
crossword
competition • 4



SATURDAY DECEMBER 21 1996



And lo, a croc appeared

Our old farmyard is an odd place in which to quibble about biblical scholarship, but here goes... Is it possible that there was a crocodile present at the birth of the baby Jesus?

Try arguing the case with a six-year-old who has slaved to make an animal costume on a promise of appearing in a nativity play celebrating the animals in the stable when Jesus was born. Frankly, neither would I wish to break it to the child who came dressed as a goose that nativity plays are generally about oxen, asses and sheep. No room at the inn, surely, for a zoo?

Here we go again... Another Christmas, another farmyard

nativity play, more problems.

Last Christmas, when the animals started to leave our ark as the floodwaters of my farming adventures began to recede, I remember thinking that it would be the farmyard nativity play that I would miss most. The idea to hold them came five years ago, with the sudden realisation that we had here a perfect setting: a stable with a manger, sheep with which to abide, cattle expert at lowing. Admittedly, we had no camel to bring the three Kings, but a Suffolk Punch could do the job instead. We even had an Angel Gabriel, played by the only lad in the village who could blow a fanfare (of sorts) on a trumpet. We told him to come dressed in white and he duly turned up in

How did all those animals get in on the nativity scene, asks Paul Heiney after his Suffolk farm was turned into a film set. No room at the inn, surely, for a zoo?

his gleaming boiler suit, which was perfect, except for the words "Nuclear Electric" emblazoned across his chest. Ah, the atom, we said, a fundamental piece of God's creation. No problem there.

Every year the weather was kind to us: Skies cleared in the late afternoon to give us a frosty twilight into which we belted out our carols, and when the girl soprano scaled the cliff face of the straw stack to sing *In the Bleak Midwinter* into the

rising moon, there was not a dry eye in the house.

But this year it was to be different. Television cameras were to be there, with piercing lights to illuminate every corner of the barn and farm buildings. And, instead of standing on a bale of straw welcoming a handful of damp neighbours, I am to appear before the entire nation on Christmas morning (ITV, 9.30am) and invite you all to share in the Nativity. Talk

about "one day on your dressing room they'll pin a star". It was as if the farm had been signed up by Lloyd Webber lock, livestock and barrel.

The producer, Ray Bruce, was insistent that this nativity play should not tread the well-worn path but, instead, examine the role and significance of the animals at the birth of Jesus. "Problem," I said. "Our animals have gone." We've still got the noble carthorses, but if he thought I was going to have

them cast as a lowly asses he was mistaken; it would be like asking Desert Orchid to play Muffin the Mule. And there are no cows left to portray the oxen, and surely even the most inventive television producer could not find a role for Alice, the Large Black pig? "Anyway," I said severely, "she's old and deaf and cranky, and the thought of disrupting her daily routine for anything as vulgar as television is out of the question."

No problem. Animals were booked. Mr White brought his cows, Cowslip and Clara, and his two donkeys, Farmer and Melba. "One donkey will do," said the producer, mindful of his budget. He did not know that these two donkeys are one

of the closest-knit teams in showbiz and that Melba without Farmer is like Abbott without Costello. Worse, Melba would kick the place down if Farmer wasn't there to keep her company. Hence two donkeys rather than the usual one.

Then the sheep arrived. My old flock came cascading down the ramp of the trailer and into the farmyard, charging round, knocking things over like children on a return visit to their old school. Suddenly it was more Resurrection than Nativity. The old farmyard was alive again with the sounds and smells of livestock; the ghosts of Christmases past coming to haunt me. But are animals really

Continued on page 2

SHOPPING 23 GARDENING 45 PROPERTY 67 SALES GUIDE 89 HOME LIFE 10 COUNTRY LIFE 12 TRAVEL 13-18 GAMES 19

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Christmas Eve, snow falling. Daddy upstairs doing his bow tie in the full-length mirror. Mummy putting on her pearls and spraying something floral on her neck. Nanny just putting the finishing touches to Floella's hair, and little Cedric looking scrumptious in his sailor suit. The car outside is warm and soft, and waiting to take them to the Trollope's Christmas bash.

Floella and Cedric are in the car now. Bunty is wishing the Nanny a Merry Christmas, and Daddy just has to grab the Trollope's presents from under the tree.

"Bunty, where did you put the presents for the Trollope's?"

"What do you mean, where did I put them? I told you to buy them."

End of Christmas idyll. Festive season ruined. Can't go to the

party without presents. Nothing is open except the garage, and you can't very well take them a can of four-star and six microwaveable hotdogs. There is an all-night chemist in King's Cross, but you haven't time to drive three miles for a gift-wrapped party pack of flavoured condoms. This is a job for Supershopper.

For all is by no means lost. At times of crisis your own home can be turned into an extremely pukka impromptu department store.

First of all, hit the book department. Scan the shelves for unread hardbacks of any kind, though this is a risky business because it is a trick everyone knows. A quick glance at the publication date will give you one away, unless you can pass it off as a collectable rarity. One favourite trick of mine is to

grab an unread Jeffrey Archer (which, in most homes, will mean any Jeffrey Archer) and scrawl on the frontispiece, "Merry Christmas from Jeffrey". They are unlikely to know his signature, and will be mightily impressed.

If something more extravagant is required, take an old copy of any Dickens novel, bash it around a bit and rip out the telltale page with edition dates on, and write, "Best wishes from Charlie" with a leaky pen, splodging some inkspots on it for authenticity.

Next stop, the perfumery. Your bathroom should contain quite a few unused aftershaves and perfumes from Christmases past, plus

SERIOUS SHOPPING

PANIC GIFTS



BY GILES COREN

the odd Body Shop gift basket still in its cellophane. Failing this, don't forget that people often run out of loo roll at Christmas, and it can make a timely present.

Right, that's a couple sorted out. Now try clothes. Your best hope is seldom-worn items of cashmere or silk. Fold them in tissue paper and, as you hand them over, say: "I got this in Hong Kong". This will explain both the apparent extravagance, and the lack of packaging. Do not forget to remove labels.

Another winner is jewellery. There are bound to be pairs of earrings around that are never worn because they are either unattractive or allergenic. Nobody throws jewellery boxes away, so find a nice one, and it will mask the inadequacy of the contents.

Next stop, hat shelf in coat cupboard. Here you should find

never-played board games, such as "Over the Hill — the Midlife Crisis Game," and "Lenny Henry's Stand-up Comedy Game". These are intended to make you laugh when you look at the box, but not to be played. Only acceptable if the cellophane is still intact.

Pictures: take any Victorian print from a spare bedroom. The chances are the receiver will not have seen it before and, if they have, they will not remember where, and will assume they have remembered it because it is famous, and therefore valuable. You can wrap this in newspaper, as print shops often do.

Now hit the food hall. Larders and kitchen cupboards can be a hive of giveable goodies. But there are rules. Acceptable foods to give include panettone, tinned cas-

soulet or confit d'oie from Fauchon, Soupe de Poisson in a jar, whole cheeses, rare mustards and small herb trees in pots.

Quite unacceptable are things such as half-finished jars of Mrs Elmswood's halmisha pickled cucumbers, pieces of cheese, tinned meat products such as Spam, pasta sauces and frozen chickens.

If all else fails, remember that "retro" is "in". Old bakelite telephones, taps, door knockers. Hoovers and early plastic swing-bins can all make a wonderful gift for the stylish home. Got an old kitchen chair that doesn't go with the new look from Manger? Well, people always need chairs.

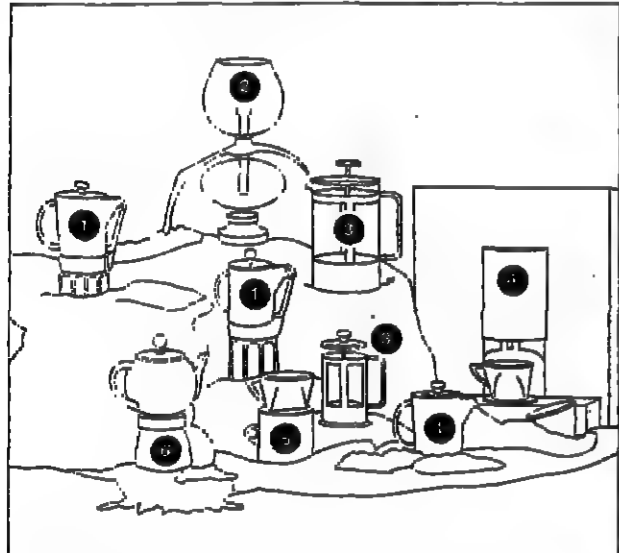
So don't let last-minute shopping worries spoil your Christmas this year. And remember, it's the thought that counts.

DES JENSON

Coffee break choice

THE PREPARATION of a cup of coffee is a wonderful ritual. It begins with the bean — which roast and blend to choose and how to have it ground — and continues through to the method used for making it filter, plunger, or percolator.

Whatever your needs or passion, here is a selection of what is on offer in the shops to help you achieve that perfect coffee-shop taste. SUE PARKER



1 Stove-top espresso coffee maker with ceramic jug, £19.50, from John Lewis Partnership (0171-629 7711 for branches). 2 Glass cone coffee maker, £25, from the Algerian Coffee Store, 52 Compton Street, London WC2 (0171-437 2480); this works by the vacuum method — light the spirit burner beneath and the bubbling hot water at the bottom swaps places with the coffee at the top. 3 Bodum Kenya range of plunger-style coffee makers: three-cup £9.99, 12-cup £19.99, in brightly coloured plastic holders from the Bodum Shop, 24 Neal Street, London WC2 (0171-240 9178). 4 Gaggie Automatica, £895, from the Algerian Coffee Store (as above); the coffee is freshly ground in the machine for each cup and it has several settings for strength and the number of cups required. 5 Simple ceramic one-cup filter which fits on top of your mug, £7.60, from the Monmouth Coffee Shop, 27 Monmouth Street, London WC2 (0171-836 5272). 6 La Signora polished aluminium stove-top espresso maker, from £13.95 for one-cup up to £28.50 for 12-cup, from The Home, Sells Mill, Victoria Road, Saltaire, Bradford (mail order, 01274 530770).



'Donkeys know Christmas is theirs'

Continued from page 1
necessary if the intention of a nativity play is a reconstruction of the birth of Jesus? Not if you take St Luke as your guide. His account of the birth of Jesus beginning, "And it came to pass that a decree went out...", is the script on which every nativity play is based. But St Luke mentions no animals: certainly no ox or ass; and there is no reference to sheep, only shepherds.

Nevertheless, everyone from Old Master in schoolchild who has tried to recreate the Nativity, whether on canvas, stained glass or cardboard, has the infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, ox and ass looking on. They did not get it from St Luke. But it has come from somewhere, and has power, this image of farmyard animals at the crib. It is almost always there: from the lowing cattle in *Away in a Manger* to Hardy's poem about the oxen kneeling at midnight.

We pictured the meek, mild creatures where
They dwell in their strawy pen.
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt that they were kneeling then.

According to producer Ray Bruce's meticulous research, the animals became more and more prominent in the story of the birth of Jesus as the centuries went by. Perhaps to St Luke and his contemporaries the presence of livestock in a stable was so commonplace that it was hardly worth recording. But writing in the 8th century, Pseudo-Matthew (in an apocryphal version of the Gospels) said:

"And on the third day after the birth... Mary went out of the cave and, entering a stable, placed the child in the manger, and the ox and the ass... incessantly adored Him. Then was fulfilled that which was said by Habakkuk the prophet saying, 'Between two animals you are made manifest'."

Since then, the ox and ass have stolen the show. There is now hardly a nativity depiction in which they do not appear. On Roman sarcophagi they are there to the exclusion even of Mary. Other animals come and go, like the camels which appeared in Rubens's *Adoration of the Magi*, or the dove representing the Holy Ghost in some schools of art, but the ox and the ass are never eclipsed. They move ever closer

Camels replace the oxen and asses in Rubens's *Adoration of the Magi*

to the baby Jesus. By the 11th century the ox can be found actually standing on the manger in which the child lies, eating the hay; there are also images to be found of the ox and the ass eating the swaddling clothes abandoned by Jesus. It is not clear whether this is some spiritual representation, or the work of an artist who knew a thing or two about the behaviour of donkeys.

One vital link in the chain of events which started with Pseudo-Matthew's ox and ass, and eventually led to a child dressed as a crocodile turning up on our farm last week, is provided by St Francis of Assisi.

In the early 13th century, three years before he died, St Francis celebrated the birth of Jesus in a manner we would recognise today. In *A Short Life of St Francis of Assisi*, the first ever

nativity play is described: "... he made ready a manger and told the people to bring hay and also an ox and an ass. When all were assembled for Christ's Mass, this Feast was celebrated. Francis standing before the manger and overflowing with joy even to tears... (an observer) declared that he saw a little child of exceeding beauty sleeping in that manger, who woke from his infant sleep when Francis stretched his arms to Him. The people of Greccio said that the hay which was used at that manger afterwards cured sick beasts, and was a marvellous remedy against plague."

St Francis embraced Christmas like no one before him, calling it the "feast of feasts". With his heart and mind brimming with his belief that all of God's creation, man and beast, was

deserving of similar respect he declared one Christmas that, "If I could speak to the emperor, I would ask that a general law be made that all who can should scatter corn and grain along the roads so that the birds and animals might have an abundance of food on the day of such great solemnity, especially our sisters the larks".

Which fondness for larks, perhaps, contributed to the eventual decree which went out from the television producer that the pupils of Hardwick Middle School in Bury St Edmunds should dress as the animals of their choice and come to our nativity play, to satisfy the longing of St Francis for all creation to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The choir of St Edmundsbury Cathedral came, too, to sing glorious carols in the barn, which until then had echoed only to the muttered oaths of farmworkers, the squeaking of mice and the occasional hoot of the owl.

Martin Shaw, canon of St Edmundsbury, came too and tried to deliver a thoughtful homily while being towed around by a violently unco-operative goat.

And thus it came to pass that there came among the animals and the film crew a crocodile whose mask fitted so tightly that at one stage the poor girl fainted.

One thing you will not see on the Christmas morning television show is the horrified look on the face of Melba the donkey when the crocodile first approached the crib.

Donkeys clearly know that Christmas is their time of year, and the thought that scholars centuries hence might look back at carefully preserved archive video and celebrate a lumpy, leathery-skinned creature with an oversized snout as being as much a part of the nativity scene was just too much for Melba to bear. She bucked and reared and threatened to upset the manger and kick out all the lights.

To cool the situation, I took my inspiration from St Francis and ordered that corn and grain might be spread so that the animals could feast in abundance. This guaranteed peace on earth and goodwill to all, at least till the crocodile was safely on the school bus heading home.

• *Away in a Manger*, produced by Ray Bruce of CTCV, can be seen on ITV on Christmas Day at 9.30am.

THREE OF A KIND

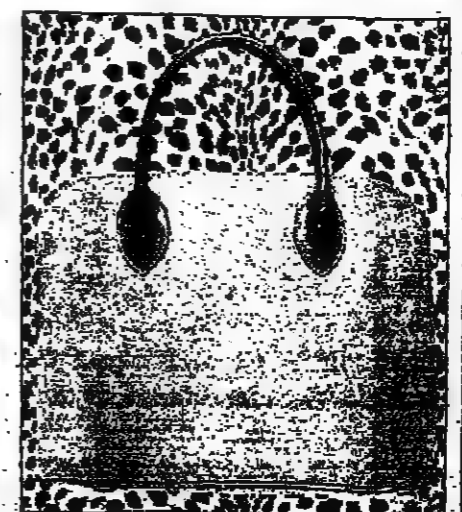
AS WITNESSED on the catwalks of Milan and Paris this season, the holdall shopper is the bag for the girl who has a little more than everything. Here are three of the best to suit every price range. HEATH BROWN



Bronze and black suede leather shopping bag, £265, from Armando Pollini, 35 Brook Street, London W1 (0171-629 7606)



Black nylon bowling bag, £105, Wannabe by Patrick Cox, Dickins & Jones, Regent Street, London W1 (0171-734 7070)



Moss moleskin and tan leather trim bag, £59.50, Franchetti Bond, 7 The Burlington Arcade, London W1 3S Beauchamp Place, SW3 (mail order, 0171-924 2602)

Cover photograph of schoolchildren playing Mary, Joseph and a crocodile in the nativity stable, by JACK DANIELS

All wrapped up and ready to party



Heath Brown
looks at what
to wear over an
evening dress
so you can
keep warm
and still look
stylish

Party clothes should always have that feel-good factor, even if it's the cover-up coat you'll be wearing in the taxi on the way there.

But it's so easy to get it wrong. Clashing hem-lengths, ugly mixes of fabrics, down-at-the-heels jackets that go to the office each day — women have seen and worn them all.

The choices for covering up those freezing shoulders are many. Elegant evening coats are the obvious option but can be a little too expensive for such infrequent use. Conversely, reverting to your trusty daytime greatcoat or overcoat denies you a glamorous entrance and rarely goes well with delicate silks, satins or velvets.

The best buys are coats that can double up to be worn for other occasions.

Susie Faut, of the image consultancy Wardrobe, recommends a luxuriously soft, long, black cashmere or light wool day coat. "This can be a simple answer to covering a long evening gown," she says, "and a long-term clothing investment for both day and night."

But avoid unnecessary decoration. Often, good, plain, long coats such as those from the La Redoute catalogue (prices start from £145), Marks & Spencer (about £140) and Mulberry (about £495) will

suffice. These have minimal detailing and are not too dressy for the day but anonymous enough for evening — and they will not date quickly, so they will be still looking stylish next season.

For a slightly more trendy look at an affordable price,

Oasis offers a full-length black coat, with fur-trimmed collar and cuffs (£119.99). Or you could add a fake fur collar to your neckline, as shown below, by Jackson (£59), with a Laura Ashley unlined light-weight velvet coat (£125).

Velvet can offer more in-



ABOVE: Cream satin and black velvet quilt stole, £80, Dickins & Jones, 224 Regent Street, London W1 (0171-734 7070). Black halterneck crepe dress, £55.99, from Welles stores (0181-910 1333)

LEFT: Black, rib, floor-length cardigan, £280, by Joseph, 26 Sloane Street, London, W1 (0171-235 5470), and Cruise, Renfield Street, Glasgow (0141-248 2476). One-shoulder silver Lycra dress, £45, Miss Selfridge, and stores nationwide (0181-910 1359). Black sequin-disc chiffon scarf, £12.99, from Oasis, 292 Regent Street, London W1, and selected branches nationwide (0171-452 1000). Black satin buckle sandals, £44.99, from Ravel stores nationwide (0171-631 0224)

TOP LEFT: Red velvet cape, £479, by Wonderful Wraps at Harrods, Knightsbridge, London SW1 (0171-730 1234). Lurex vest with belt, £29.99, from Oasis (as above)

spired choices. Styles to look for are either long-line coats or more romantic capes. But beware, capes and cloaks are an acquired taste: they can look stunning but there is a danger of appearing too much like you are going to a fancy dress party — a sort of Mystic-Meg-cum-Moll-Flanders look.

To avoid this, drape your cape over modern, sexy, slightly clubby minimal outfits in shiny satin or lurex to give a new twist to an old favourite. A welcome addition to many

wardrobes this year has been the full-length cardigan (or knitted coat, as some labels describe them). It is an up-to-date look that fares well over long sheath dresses or with evening trousers.

Above left, we have used a black angora maxi cardigan from Joseph (£260); there are other good examples available from Nicole Farhi (£149), Jigsaw (£120) and Miss Selfridge (£40).

To add a little old-style Hollywood glamour, the ultimate accessory is a generous quilted stole, shown above, in reversible satin and velvet, from Dickins & Jones (£80). Admittedly these can seldom be worn without looking dressy and, therefore, fail our multi-use criteria, but the cosy yet-sexy glamour that they provide is worth it.

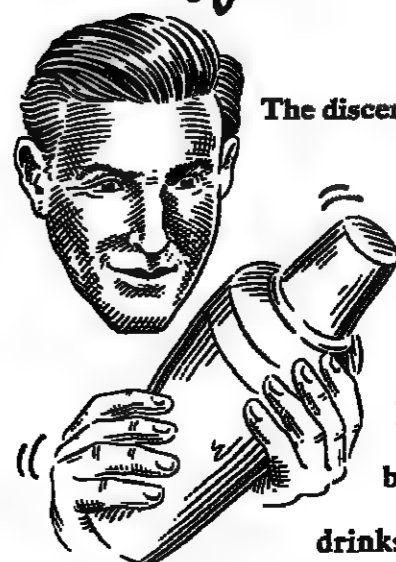
The widest selections of stoles can be found at Liberty and other large department stores.



ABOVE: Blue velvet coat dress, £125, from Laura Ashley nationwide (01688 622116). Blue two-tone shell top, £27, from Dorothy Perkins nationwide (0171-291 2604). Blue two-tone trousers, £39, from Joseph (as above). Blue fake-fur collar, £59, by Jackson, from Fenwicks, Bond Street, W1 (0171-243 9900). Photographer: Richard Burns. Make-up: Sally Kvetzheim. Styling: Amandip Uppal

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drinks it that

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following distillation

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GLOAG'S



GARDEN ANSWERS

STEPHEN ANDERTON
replies to readers' letters

Q What specific controls do you recommend against vine weevils? I kill more than a hundred every winter from my begonia tubers — and still they come. — J.L. Thorne, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

A The most effective chemicals against vine weevils are only available to commercial growers. A good biological control for amateurs is *Nemasys H*, available from Defenders, Occupation Road, Wye, Ashford, Kent TN25 5EN (01233 813121). *Nemasys H* is effective when the soil temperature is above 12°C.

Q I have four daturas in pots. Last year they bloomed profusely, this year there are no flowers at all. I have fed them weekly with tomato food. What am I doing wrong? — C.M. Page, Westcliff on Sea, Essex.

A Given a chance and space, brugmansias (as we now have to call the woody daturas) make a massive, greedy, fibrous root system. They should produce white or golden trumpets through summer and autumn. After flowering, cut them back hard. They will then shoot away again and, as spring comes, they will need rich feeding to maximise early growth. Remember that all parts of the plant are poisonous.

Q I have a beautiful passion flower, *Passiflora caerulea*, which covers the walls of my patio. But every year it suffers from mould, which a friend says is due to lack of water. How do I treat this without spraying, and can I eat the fruit? — J. Whitaker, Brighton, East Sussex.

A Aphids sometimes attack the shoots of passion flowers, causing mould on the lower leaves from excreted honeydew, so check that first. Plants with insufficient water and in very dry air sometimes die back at the tips, giving the impression of a fungal wilt. But if your plant is fruiting well it cannot be too short of water. Try watering more generously and hosing the plant over now and then, when the sun is not directly on it.

You can eat the fruit of blue passion flower, the only one that can be grown well outdoors, but they are insipid. There are more than 20 edible species, but only a handful grown commercially for

fruit, including bright pink flowered *Passiflora mollissima* with banana-shaped fruit. Of those species suitable for a cold greenhouse in Britain, the following have good fruit: *Passiflora acinosa*, *P. edulis* (the common granadilla), *P. mixta*, and *P. mollissima*. For more information look at John Vanderplank's book *Passion Flowers*, recently revised and reprinted by Cassell at £30 (ISBN 0 304 34216 5).

Q Can we put grass clippings which contain sycamore seeds in our compost bin without producing hundreds of seedlings when we use the compost? — A. Sennett, Chislehurst, Kent.

A Yes. A good compost heap or bin is perfectly capable of cooking the life out of sycamore seeds. The risk, perhaps, is that there are always parts of a compost heap, at the edges, which do not cook properly, and these might contain viable seeds. This is why it is important to turn compost heaps at some stage to re-oxygenate the heap and to turn the dryer, cooler outside into the centre.

Q A Cure for Moles: I. Morley of Wantage writes to tell a delightful tale of her vicar, who rid his garden of moles by putting the mechanism from a musical birthday card in a plastic bag buried in the ground. The moles have kept away ever since.

● Readers should write to: Garden Answers, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. We regret that it may not be possible to deal with every request. Advice is offered without legal responsibility. The Times also regrets that any enclosures cannot be returned.



Passiflora caerulea

Jane Owen on how a single cutting inspired a Bristol man to raise glorious blooms on a budget

Love flowers in a cold climate



Chris Rose, who grows streptocarpus plants in his unheated flat, took three firsts this year at the Royal Horticultural Society Show

Buy a streptocarpus from a garden centre and it will probably come with a label announcing that the plant will not suffer temperatures below 10°C. They have lovely flowers — funnel shaped with a bonnet-like frill and colours ranging from pink to blue — but, for those of us who use heating sparingly, 10°C minimum is more than can be promised to a plant.

However streptocarpus, which originate from South Africa, are tougher than many plant labels suggest and Chris Rose, one of Bristol's authorities on the plant, cultivates them in a flat without any central heating. Last winter, in his streptocarpus-filled lean-to, the temperature dipped to minus 1°C but all the plants survived unharmed.

By "all" he is referring to several hundred — and that's just the lean-to. In the rest of the flat the numbers top the thousand mark; trestle tables around the windows sag under the weight of plants; his computer is surrounded by 100 or so and, underneath the trestle tables, plants that have finished flowering have a rest. More spill

out into a few well-shaded cold frames in the garden of his Bristol flat. This is obsessive (and highly successful) plantmanship on a budget — Mr Rose reckons his highest cost comes from the compost he has to buy in, about £100 a year at most.

Ten years ago a fellow student at Bristol University gave him a leaf fragment. Out of courtesy Mr Rose, who had his work cut out caring for his two large allotments and special collections of iris, helianthemum or rock rose, pelargoniums and hardy geraniums, coaxed the leaf cutting into a plant which stubbornly refused to flower.

After a couple of years Mr Rose resolved to throw it on the compost heap but, in that curious way that plants have when threatened with shears, spades or dark thoughts, it produced dark violet flowers with a yellow centre — it was probably a 'Constant Nymph'.

And with it flowered Mr Rose's magnificent passion which has overwhelmed his life ("I forgot to have a social life," he says) leaving only his job with the Green Party untouched. His dedication has now received the recognition it deserves: this August, at one of its

prestigious Westminster shows, the Royal Horticultural Society awarded Mr Rose three firsts for his streptocarpus plants, all his own hybrids grown in modest surroundings and shipped to London on an InterCity 125. None of the award-winning plants was named.

For Mr Rose, the pleasure comes from the plants rather than the glory of naming, although colleagues in the world of African

violets (cousins of streptocarpus) are trying to persuade him that while (DWEL) 105 gives him an accurate record of a plant with dusky red, white-throated flowers, it might be more user-friendly to give it a name.

(DWEL) 105 was a mere 51 weeks old — that is 51 weeks from a seed — when it won a first for Mr Rose at the RHS show. His other two firsts were awarded to one with stunning magenta flowers, and the other with cloudy violet blue face with yellow centre.

What distinguishes Mr Rose's plants from those you might buy in supermarkets to put on a kitchen windowsill are the variety of flower colour and size, and the size of the leaves. While most commercially grown streptocarpus have at least one of their brittle primula-like leaves reaching about six inches, his plants tend to have their largest leaves reaching to about ten inches. But that is due mainly to the fact that he grows his in such low light levels (streptocarpus can't take direct light anyway) that the plants have to compensate by growing large leaves. Streptocarpus are easy to grow from cuttings (see

GROWING TIPS

■ Keep the plants out of direct sunlight but in a bright position, in rich, moist, fine compost and a humid atmosphere and they will flower from March to November or December. Allow to dry out before watering and give a high potash feed throughout the growing season.

■ If the plants are likely to suffer temperatures between 10°C and 15°C, they should be kept as dry as possible.

■ Plants that have finished flowering should be dead-headed and watered sparingly. They should not be fed until March when they should be repotted to flower in May.

■ As the flowers open, the plants need a good, high potash feed. Mr Rose waters his with quarter-strength tomato feed.

■ Propagation is easy by leaf cuttings taken in early autumn. Choose a middle-aged leaf with no flower stems. Cut a transverse section of a leaf, make a slit in the compost mixture and push the leaf about 1" in down.

■ About six plantlets should emerge in six to eight weeks. These will flower in nine months. Plant them into individual pots covered loosely with cloudy plastic bags from greenhouses, and leave them on a windowsill without any direct light.

■ Keep the pot relatively small to encourage flowering but make sure new leaves don't touch the edge of the pot because they grow horizontally.

growing tips box, above) and so, although Mr Rose will not sell his hybrids, his "bits of leaves" — which are available to any fellow enthusiast so long as he has the stock — might be worth a try.

The national collection of streptocarpus is held by Dibley's Nursery, Llanedfan, Ruthin, Wales LL15 2LG (01978 790677) which has a good selection of plants for sale to the public. About 60 varieties are available on mail order and the nursery recommends choosing plants now to be sent out in March, at the beginning of the growing season.

Dibley's catalogue is free — send an A4 stamped addressed envelope to the address above. Those wanting to visit the nursery or the national collection should ring the number above.

Mr Rose emphasises that his collection is likely to appeal to streptocarpus enthusiasts rather than those who enjoy looking at gardens. Those who would like to visit the collection should write to Mr Rose at 26 Devonshire Road, Bristol BS6 7NU. Please add your telephone number or include a stamped addressed envelope.

WEEKEND TIPS

■ Take root cuttings in a pot of plants such as pelargonium, verbena, and forms of *Geranium sanguineum*.

■ Protect house plants such as poinsettia from the cold of overheated rooms and cold, draughty window ledges.

■ Top-dress fruit trees under glass with manure and bonemeal. If required, apply sulphate on bare ground among strawberry plants and cane fruit, to stop weeds next year.

■ Relieve shrubs bent under the weight of snow before it freezes.

ACROSS

- 1 Impressive occasion for Jumbo's last appearance (6)
- 4 Loth to suggest something of Scott's to read (3,5,2,10)
- 16 Pirate takes succession of ships with call to scuttle one completely (4,4,3,6)
- 17 Quickness that produces illusion of movement (9)
- 18 Artistic technique of a dab hand (7)
- 19 Granny, for example, is after the best hairpiece (7)
- 20 Author who didn't have to abide Arnold's questioning (11)
- 21 Preparation for launch that finally comes to nothing (5-4)
- 22 Vegetable I swallowed with new drink (8)
- 23 Prepared to work, dust off promising notes (8)
- 26 Myriads of killers training to go out East (16,2,3,6,7)
- 30 Firmly secure stand after front falls off (5)
- 32 Data analyst is a big government supporter (7)
- 34 Around midday, tucked in article dropped from first issue by editor (7)
- 36 Prepare for job as union negotiator (5)
- 37 Dreadful pain associated with a loss for such as Hausman's lad (9)
- 39 Game one follows with people is disaster (9)
- 41 Wonderful person you may have at dinner soon (7)
- 42 Military leader has got an appalling shape (7)
- 43 Depress in jewel-bearing vein not exhausted (9)
- 44 Incomplete feature arrived back in skeletal form (9)
- 45 So long in a detached state (5)
- 46 Fell to cover point, irritatingly caught (7)
- 48 Chinese craft turns horizontally to follow missile (7)
- 50 Start of good weather for harvest (5)
- 51 Story of a teacher's most effective period (5,2,2,4,6)
- 57 Is left with one noun and two pronouns (8)
- 58 Just starting to move slowly. Antarctic explorer abandoning Pole (8)
- 59 Acidhead showing acuity (9)
- 62 Strike in French terminal (4,2,5)
- 64 Current controller turned ruddy odd, comparatively (7)
- 66 Surprised sound from Scot tucking into cheese roll (7)
- 67 Change positions of pieces in back rank (9)
- 68 Bear left here — it's the terminus (10,7)
- 69 Infamous book-keeper (4,11,5)
- 70 Ring here for service (6)

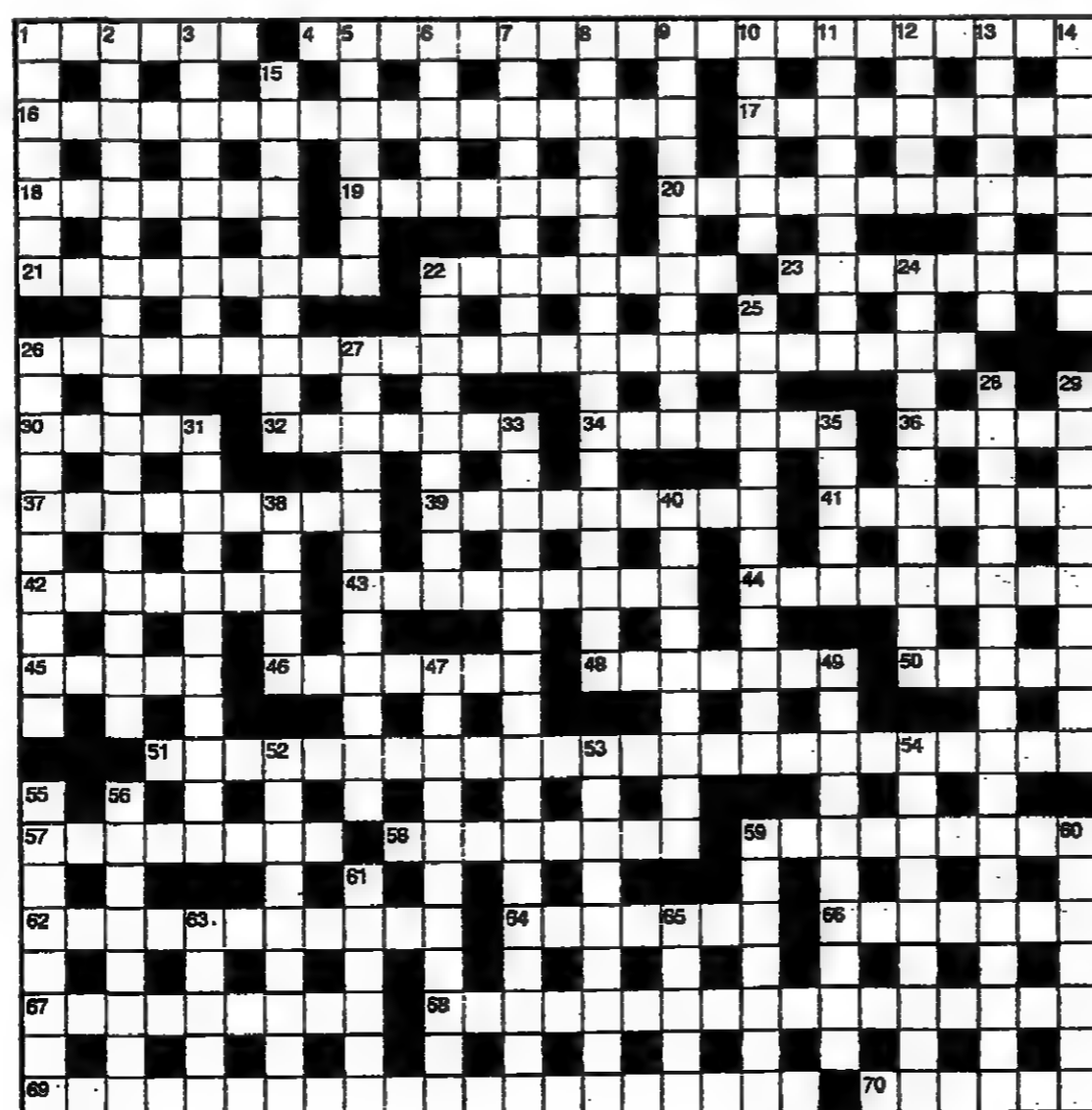
DOWN

- 1 A stupid chap is unable to communicate (7)
- 2 After which sovereign was replaced by half-crowns (8,10)
- 3 Preservative sailor put on unfinished bird (9)
- 5 Encourage to try to catch up (7)
- 6 Outwitted in rebellion, and put on trial (3,2)
- 7 Curious rationale for one who transfers ownership (9)
- 8 Thoroughly strip and get to wash (4,2,3,8)
- 9 Put into perspective warning over cut (11)
- 10 Book-maker taking one's capital on a horse at the start (6)
- 11 Elizabeth's favourite cheese (9)
- 12 Take carriage about a mile, or go by foot (5)
- 13 One doesn't originally behave as a sort of flatterer (8)
- 14 Bull has no ring — removed from nose repeatedly (8)
- 15 As one dreadfully crude and so on might well be (10)
- 22 I almost make a mistake in drugs before operation done for first time (9)
- 24 Applying a name tag in error on bottom of sketch (11)
- 25 Ready reckoner for traveller abroad (8,4)
- 26 Annie Oakley, perhaps — or La Pasionaria, say? (10)
- 27 East European region in which Slav ran a tiny resort (12)
- 28 Initially putting a knot here'd check if recollection needed (6,12)
- 29 The temerity of the girl, introducing herself (10)
- 31 Hear prop got injured, put in body-scanner (11)
- 33 Sign of ominous development in golf-club handle (4,3,2,3,5)
- 35 Had a chance to show off country centage (5)
- 38 Does she make herself a name in the Times? (5)
- 40 It's swell, having met nice US characters (9)
- 47 Inexperienced felder, but he helps the bowlers (5-4)
- 49 It may suit one fine, having a regular day off (6,4)
- 52 There's precisely nothing in odd parts of Argentina — such as this (9)
- 53 Foolish acts, but initially stopping short of mad ones (9)
- 54 Copy most of answers without punishment for Jack (9)
- 55 Like some organs, or well-tempered clavier? (8)
- 56 A large number of handouts distributed (8)
- 59 After Christmas spirits, he decided to stop being tight (7)
- 60 Bird trapped by cunning, without mercy (7)
- 61 About to check, having received a warning (10)
- 63 Turn over gun, one Colt — that's an order (8)
- 65 Quietly concealed order unleashing bound (5)

CHRISTMAS JUMBO CROSSWORD



Win a methuselah of Moët & Chandon champagne and £100 in our festive quiz. Five runners-up will receive £100. Entries, by January 6, to: Christmas Jumbo Crossword, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. Solution on January 11



NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
POSTCODE _____

Times Two Christmas Holiday Crossword

There are no prizes for this crossword. The answers will be published on Monday, December 23

ACROSS

- 1 Beer/lemonade drink (6)
- 4 Concealing contempt (8,2,4,6)
- 16 Between ruling ministries (17)
- 17 History in date order (9)
- 18 Constructed anew (7)
- 19 Crop storehouse (7)
- 20 Of poor quality (3,2,2,4)
- 21 Malefactor (9)
- 22 Mountaineers (8)
- 23 Heavy club (8)
- 26 Prove people's minds (4,3,3,3,4,3,4)
- 30 Custard apple (5)
- 32 Making ground plan (7)
- 34 Confident; definite (7)
- 36 Revive; mass meeting (5)
- 37 One leaving for new life (9)
- 39 Country wear (5,4)
- 41 Railed town vehicle (7)
- 42 Instructor (7)
- 43 Clumsy incompetence (9)
- 44 (To the) ultimate level (3,6)
- 45 Fruit; water variety (5)
- 46 Demand too much of (7)
- 48 An enactment (7)
- 50 Egypt peninsula (5)
- 51 Small, proper beginnings (5,2,3,5,9)
- 57 Eastern (8)
- 58 Wearing fingerless gloves (8)
- 59 Metal for recycling (5,4)
- 62 Oblong (11)
- 64 Foot lever (7)
- 66 Fungus disease (7)
- 67 Most hot, arid (weather) (9)
- 68 Royal birthday parade (8,3,6)
- 69 Eg gang, dram, piano (10,10)
- 70 Regard highly (6)

DOWN

- 1 (US) down-and-out area (4,3)
- 2 Self-descriptively (written) (18)
- 3 Swashbuckling courage (7-2)
- 5 Repayer for injury (7)
- 6 It, port; a cake (5)
- 7 Repetition (of action) (9)
- 8 "Govt..." by the people, for the people" speech (10,7)
- 9 Reversible words (11)
- 10 Subtle distinction (6)
- 11 Tiddling joint (5,4)
- 12 Slowly (mus.) (5)
- 13 Barred; kept out (8)
- 14 Largest land animal (8)
- 15 Cause-of-death exam (4-6)
- 22 Steering group (9)
- 24 Wool-gatherers (11)
- 25 Of acerbic speech (5-7)
- 26 When light meal is ready (10)
- 27 Muscle spasm; child's overactivity (12)
- 28 (Scientists') magnifier (8,10)
- 29 Etruscan (10)
- 31 Keep girl off stage, Mrs — (Coward) (11)
- 33 Pip its hero (Dickens) (5,12)
- 35 Chaamel; abandon (5)
- 38 Human trunk (5)
- 40 (Escaping) without harm (9)
- 47 Mixed-fruit ice cream (5-6)
- 49 Old hearing aid (3,7)
- 52 Theatre patrons (9)
- 53 Pub landlord (9)
- 54 Rorty (9)
- 55 Thick bread slice (8)
- 56 More honest (8)
- 59 Add sugar (to) (7)
- 60 Patent remedy (7)
- 61 Very drunk (slang) (6)
- 63 Farewell (5)
- 65 Jeans fabric (5)

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HOMESWAP

What you can buy for the same money around the country



A long lease on this three-bedroom flat with a roof terrace, on the upper floors of a corner Victorian house overlooking Warwick Square, half a mile from Victoria Station, costs £270,000, including a share of the freehold. (Chesham Residential, 0171-834 9998).



For the same sum this architect-designed six-bedroom family house on the banks of Loch Lomond, near Arrochar, Scotland comes with six acres of gardens, tennis courts, triple garage, a boat-house, slipway and mooring. (Savills, 0141 226 6991).

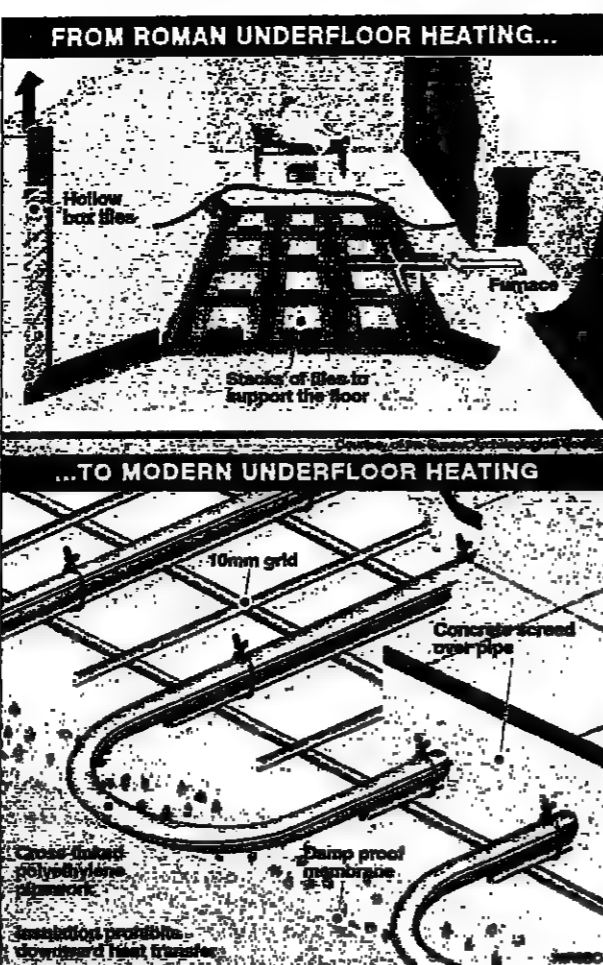


For a little more—£295,000—you could buy this secluded five-bedroom 19th century house in seven acres of formal gardens and woodland, at Coddensham, Suffolk. Oslewood House comes with double garage, thatched cold house, timber-framed barn, summerhouse and tennis court. (Savills, 01473 226191).

CHERYL TAYLOR

Perfect for a night on the tiles

The Romans had the answer to heating today's open-plan and loft-style homes. Emma Mahony on the value of underfloor heating



Underfloor heating (UFH) is enjoying its biggest revival in Britain since Roman times. Although it accounts for a minute fraction of the total heating market, loft apartments and self-build developments are demanding better heating for rooms with high ceilings. One of the main reasons for the popularity of UFH is that it is cheap to install. While UFH has always been a favourite at the top of the end of the property market, lower prices are bringing it in line with radiators. You can now install a system from as little as £12 to £35 per sq metre. Prices vary according to location and size of the floor area: the greater the area, the cheaper it becomes. Ian Mills of Wirso, one of the biggest underfloor heating suppliers in the world, attributes the interest to homeowners who buy a plot of land and design their own houses. "Although the capital cost is higher, UFH will last the life of the house and, unlike radiators, does not need renewing every 12 to 15 years," he says. "Once installed in a well-insulated building, the running costs will be considerably lower—particularly for rooms with high ceilings." The cheaper running costs are



Madeleine Sanderson enjoys the warm stone floor of her apartment in west London, which has underfloor heating

because of the principle of radiant heat, which requires a lower air temperature because warmth is spread evenly across the room. Radiators give off convection heat, heating the higher strata of the air in the room first instead of warming from the feet upwards.

Some architects are particularly keen on the out-of-sight aspect of UFH, because it fits in with their minimalist designs. "Radiators can dictate how you finish a room. They are unnecessarily dominant without spreading heat evenly across a space," says Ian Hogarth, of Littman Goddard Hogarth. "We often recommend underfloor heating to clients, especially in loft-style apartments where it helps with open planning."

Madeleine Sanderson, a film producer who lives in a loft-style apartment in west London, inherited her underfloor heating from the previous owner, an architect. "I'd never have thought of installing it myself," she says. "But it does seem to stop the stone floors being so chilly, especially

when so much of the heat of the flat goes out through the big windows. My favourite bit is coming down the stairs in the morning and stepping on to a warm floor."

Comfort is the main reason why people choose underfloor heating. When Mark and Alex Hoyle restored the kitchen at Loddendon Manor at Staplehurst, Kent, they considered installing heaters in the bottom of the kitchen units. "But the heat would have been too much," Mrs Hoyle says.

With an old timber-joisted ceiling nearly 25ft high and a floor space of 28 sq ft, radiators would have been ugly and ruined the period look, particularly when wall-mounted. "Underfloor heating was the best option, especially as the room was north facing," Mrs Hoyle says.

As part of a six-week refurbishment, including underlaying a concrete floor before installing the heating, the system they put in cost about £3,000. "Our main cost was not the heating but the tiles; we invested in an Umbria terracotta-style stone, which cost £6,000 in total," Mrs Hoyle says. "But it is worth it—and the dogs love it."

Modern UFH systems are particularly suitable for ground floors, because they can be used with stone, marble, granite, ceramic tiles and timber. In the 1960s and 1970s, the systems were run on electricity and were expensive. Now they are based on hot water pushed through cross-linked polyethylene plastic pipes, which are sandwiched between insulating layers. The pipes are laid in a snake or spiral fashion and can be linked to radiators upstairs.

One of the main downsides to UFH installation is that it means a lot of upheaval, making it much more suitable for putting into new homes or where major refurbishment is being done.

Most systems can be installed with a normal heating boiler and are more energy-efficient, because the system works at a lower temperature. "To make radiators work they have to be about 80C to 85C.

When you consider that water in a hot tap is 55C, you can see that there is a lot of pressure on a boiler," says Rex Ingram, of the UFH Manufacturers' Association. "Water in the pipes for UFH need only be about 43C, no hotter than the palm of your hand."

While Britain may have a long way to go until it reaches Germany's eco-mindedness, where 80 per cent of new houses have UFH, it has still come a long way since that Roman underfloor heating. In those days, the systems were stoked by a furnace outside the building carrying hot gases through a flue into a central expansion chamber in the room. Temperature control was so hard to regulate that, as the floor got hotter, the Romans resorted to wearing wooden-soled sandals. Not quite so dog-friendly.

• UFH Manufacturers' Association, 0181-441 7080.
• Recommended companies: Wirso, 01293 548512; IPEC, 0171-022 4333; Reig, 01299 250700; David Robbins, 01424 830140; Thermoboard, 01902 444122; Envirofloor, 0115-900 3699.

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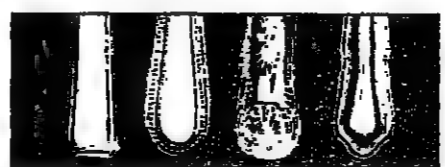
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Paul Richardson offers some advice on preparing for a seasonal visitor

A clean sweep for Santa

As you hang the stockings around the fireplace on Christmas Eve, spare a thought for the grey-haired old gent who will shortly be arriving to fill them. In a recent survey, nine out of ten Santas said they had developed coughs as a result of inhaling soot. It was bad enough sending little boys up chimneys, but sending OAPs down them seems like a very cruel form of exploitation.

But there is something we can do. We can have our chimneys regularly cleaned, which at least eases the pressure on Santa's lungs and cuts down on his laundry bills. A dirty chimney does no favours for the rest of us either. Recent incidents of carbon monoxide poisoning from a blocked or partially blocked flue, and the increasing frequency of chimney fires (Britain has one of the highest rates in Europe), suggest that we are insufficiently acquainted with our local chimney sweeps — or "chimney technicians" as they are now called. Depending on the kind of fuel burned in the fireplace, a chimney should be cleaned either once every three months (wood fires and stoves), once a year (oil, gas, smokeless coal) or twice a year (bituminous coal).

According to Martin Glynn of the National Association of Chimney Sweeps, whose 215-strong membership accounts for most of the sweeps operating in the UK, the main cause of chimney problems is the build up of tar and dust on the walls of the flue, which can only be removed by the action of brushing. ("There are a lot of



Martin Glynn sweeps another chimney clean before the big day arrives

cowboys who go around convincing housewives that a vacuum cleaner alone will do the trick, which is just not true," Mr Glynn says.) Sooty build-up is exacerbated by burning wet or green wood, which releases dangerous amounts of creosote and tar into the chimney.

If your fire won't light or smokes out your living room, the cause may be a badly-fitted chimney pot or cowl — the technical term for a device that prevents birds and other objects, alive or dead, from falling in.

Again, the chimney sweep can help, diagnosing the problem and replacing the offending piece of roof furniture. "Good sweeps will be looking up to see what's on top of the flue before their van wheels have stopped," Mr Glynn says.

Calling in a sweep is a far less bothersome business than you might imagine. The chimney technician at work is also a fascinating sight to see. The sweeping process normally takes between

30 and 45 minutes. Modern sweeps use plenty of dust-sheets and a vacuum, which is just as well, because a chimney which has not been cleaned for three or four years may produce a sadful of soot.

The NACS is keen to rid the profession of its Mary Poppins image, but sweeping also has its entertaining side. In some quarters a sweep is still thought to bring good luck, and many of the association's members offer a wedding call-out service. Tradition dies hard, despite all the talk of safety and efficiency. In a well-worn custom, when the sweeping's done and the blackened brush emerges from the rooftops, leaving a chimney you could eat your mince-pies off, the customer is always invited outside to take a look. "The children love it," Mr Glynn says. (And so will Santa Claus.)

• The National Association of Chimney Sweeps, freephone 0800 833466.
• Martin Glynn of B.G. Wright Sweeps can be contacted on 0181-302 5468.

The flat
break
the bank
Monte



The flat to break the bank in Monte

Eighth floor apartment, Le Florestan, Boulevard D'Italie, Monaco • Price: 4.5m • **Settings:** This is an address to impress. Nice airport 20 mins by car, or 8 mins by helicopters. Yachts can be moored just opposite. • **Shopping:** Your guess first please • **Entertainment:** Lacoste for the tiny Italian cafés or haute couture for snooty French establishments. Drive the Monaco Grand Prix circuit every day

You will not be surprised to learn that every room, except

property. I suspect that covering the walls with high-denomination dollar bills would have been cheaper. Do silk walls need vacuuming? Who cares; disposing of dust would,

This flat's one drawback is location: only A-minus. In the property hierarchy one really ought to overlook either the harbour or Casino square, or have panoramic views of the

I was also told that Monaco is relatively free of street crime, so no worries about having your Rolex stolen. Here, Lamborghinis and cus-

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— 7 —

As you prepare for the midwinter madness that grips the stores, here is our guide to what's on offer...

Where early birds get the best bargains

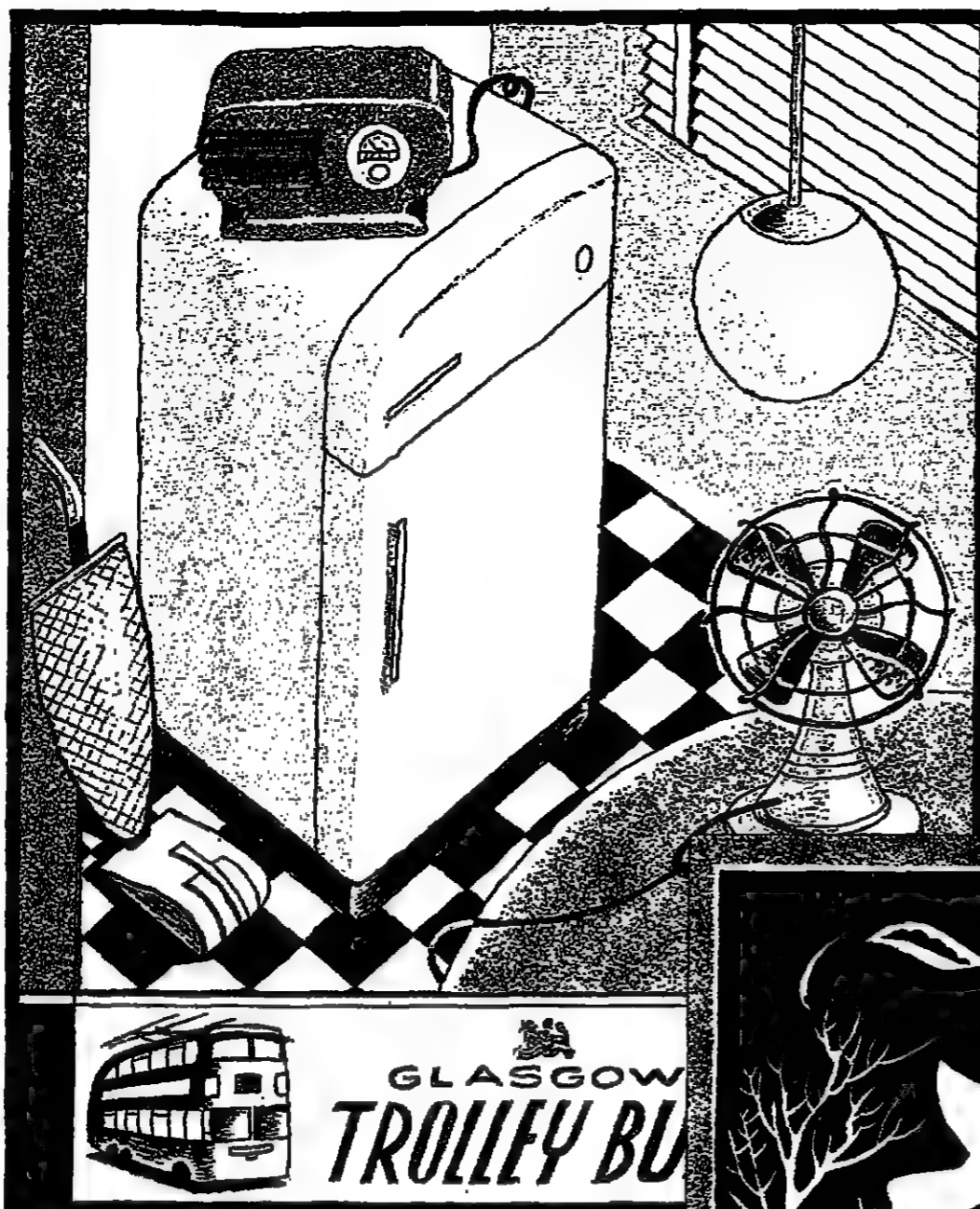
LONDON STORES

Debenhams
334-348 Oxford Street, W1, and branches nationwide (0171-408 4444). From Dec 27; Dec 26 in Scotland.
Up to 50 per cent off items throughout the store.

Fenwick
New Bond Street, W1 (0171-629 9161) and branches nationwide. From Dec 27 for three weeks.
Up to 50 per cent off items throughout the store. Womenswear: Nicole Farhi velvet jeans from £129 to £59; John Smedley ribbed cardigans from £75 to £39; Ben de Lisi black ribbed wool-mix jackets from £119 to £209; Admyra blonde wool/cashmere long coats from £189 to £79.

Harrods
87 Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, SW1 (0171-730 1234). From Jan 8-Feb 1.
Up to 55 per cent off items throughout the store with an extra 10 per cent off for Harrods account customers' purchases made on Jan 11. Customers spending £200 or more in a single transaction during the first four days of the sale can enter a draw to win a Volkswagen Passat. Sale items include 40 per cent off selected silver-plated hollowware, eg punch set was £259, sale price £149; 40-50 per cent off selected Atlantis crystal; Admiral 22SL American-style fridge/freezer was £1,899, sale price £1,299; 50 per cent off Harrods luggage carts; 33 per cent off assorted throws; 33 per cent off hand-embroidered Windsor bed linen, eg queen-size lace bedspread reduced from £125 to £85; up to 75 per cent off selected John Galiano womenswear; 40 per cent off Jil Sander; 30 per cent off Christian Lacroix, eg ladies' turquoise jacket was £269, sale price £189; 40 per cent off French Connection knitwear, jackets, coats and skirts; 30 per cent off selected Dolce & Gabbana; 50 per cent off Kenzo, Escada and Donna Karan; up to 50 per cent off selected toiletries including Plenitude and Crabtree & Evelyn. Menswear: 30 per cent off Calvin Klein jeans and shirts, Armani jeans and Ralph Lauren; Burberry classic trench coat was £625, now £399; Cerruti ties were £55, now £29.95; 30-50 per cent off selected childrenswear including Paul Smith, DKNY, Versace and Moschino.

Harvey Nichols
109-125 Knightsbridge, SW1 (0171-235 5000). From Dec 27.
Up to 50 per cent off many items. During the first four days of the sale there will be an additional 10 per cent discount for Harvey Nichols' account holders on all reduced merchandise. CK jeans were £99, sale price £44.50; Ann Demeulemeester black jacket was £650, sale price £325; Versus by Gianni Versace tuxedo was £875, sale price £437.50; Giorgio Armani navy suit was £695, sale price £495; women's Dolce & Gabbana mohair jacket was £780, sale price £468; Michael Kors leather trousers were £980, sale price £490; Calvin Klein jersey dress was £900, sale price



GLASGOW TROLLEY BUS
1450; Givenchy bias dress was £2,410, down to £1,205; Ann Demeulemeester bootleg trousers were £270, sale price £135; Dolce & Gabbana black handbags were £445, sale price £222.50; Calvin Klein black handbags were £430, sale price £215; Ralph Lauren bath towels down from £22.50 to £16.50; hands towels were £12, sale price £9.

House of Fraser
Army & Navy, Victoria Street, SW1 (0171-834 1234); Barkers, Kensington High Street, W8 (0171-937 5432); Dickens & Jones, Regent Street, W1 (0171-734 7070); D.J. Evans, Oxford Street, W1 (0171-439 8800) and stores nationwide (0171-463 2288). From Dec 27, Scotland: from Dec 26.
Menswear: up to one third off Pierre Balmain shirts; 40 per cent off Pringle knitwear; Daniel Hechter suit was £230, now £170; YSL logo boxer shorts were £16, sale price £8. Womenswear: up to 50 per cent off Marley scarfs; dogtooth three-quarter length jacket was £90, now £60; six-button reefer jacket was £75, now £49. Homeware: Slumberland Copper Seal 4-drawer divan set was £799,

now £499; Henley large sofa was £1,090, sale price £990. Electrical: Toshiba 28in colour television was £649, now £469; JVC Mini System £499, now £379; up to 50 per cent off selected china and glass.

John Lewis
Oxford Street, W1 (0171-629 7711); Brent Cross Shopping Centre (0181-202 6535); Peter Jones, Sloane Square, SW1 (0171-730 3434) and 23 stores nationwide. From Dec 23 and Dec 31; call 0171-629 7711 to find which date is correct for your nearest branch.
Up to 50 per cent off selected lines. The "never knowingly undersold" policy is still in operation during the clearance period. Branches sell good quality goods throughout the sale and well-priced lines bought by John Lewis at favourable rates under their "special purchase" scheme with manufacturers. Philips FW 18 micro Hi-Fi systems from £329 to £199. Second: polyester/cotton Jonelle percale single sheets from £10.75 to £7.50; double sheets from £13 to £9.75; king-size from £15 to £11.25. China: Mixed Vegetable tea pots from £29.50 to £17.50; Check and Dot 27in plate from £8.50 to £4.95; Johnson Brothers' Marie range breakfast cups from £4.95 to £2.95. China seconds: Blue Italian 25cm plates from £8.50 to £4.95; Toast & Marmalade teapots from £33 to £19.75; Worcester cakeplates from £14.50 to £21.75. Curtain seconds: Solitaire plain satin 168x136cm from £49 to £25; 214x220cm from £35 to £16.50. Dress fabric seconds: 228cm cotton/polyester plain sheeting from £6.50 to £2.95. Duvers reduced to clear: Jonelle Novaloft polyester 12-tog single duvets from £23 to £17.50; king-size from £43 to £31; superking from £51 to £39. Reduced furnishing fabric per metre: dupion from £7.95 to £3.95; moire from £9.95 to £4.95; tapes: trapes from £19.50 to £9.95 and semi-plain fabrics from £13.50 to £7; printed Primrose Hill in grass and eggshell print from £12.50 to £4.95; Azalea print from £12.50 to £5.95; Portofino print from £13.50 to £6.95.

Liberty
214-220 Regent Street, W1, and branches nationwide (0171-734 1234). From Dec 27 for three weeks.
Up to 50 per cent off items throughout the store. Pewter-framed mirror sconces were £55, sale price £40; five-arm steel chandeliers were £225, sale price £150; Armenian rug was £5,600, sale price £2,800; Turkish Burdur carpet was £1,950, sale price £975; Iranian kilim was £850, sale price £425; Bassano robes were £115, sale price £75; king duvets were £319, sale price £159; Peter Reed Egyptian cotton single sheets were £39, sale price £29; white goose-down pillows were £85, sale price £42.50; Missoni robes were £145, sale price £99; Laure Japy Figaree dinner plates were £30, sale price £15; Dartington burgundy glasses were £13.25, sale price £7.95; Wedgwood California dinner plates were £19.95, sale price £9.95; Lagostina cookware four-piece pan set was £169.95, sale price £84.95; Carrs silver cutlery 44-piece set was £2,799, sale price £1,399; Sabatier six-inch cook's knife was £34.95, sale price £23.95; chef's butcher's apron was £19.95, sale price £9.95; traditional roll-arm sofa was £2,395, sale price £1,195; Liberty PVC furnishing fabric by the metre

Lauren selected throws 50 per cent off; Designers Guild seconds, 30 per cent off; also 30 per cent off selected Caroline Charles lines. Carpets and flooring: 10 per cent off Amtico flooring; 12 per cent off Bruce Wood flooring; 65 per cent off Zermatt. Pembroke Twist and Perfection carpets.

REGIONAL

Bentalls
High Street, Bracknell, Berkshire (01344 424678); Broadway Centre, Ealing, London W5 (0181-567 3040); Wood Street, Kingston upon Thames, south-west London (0181-546 1001); Lakeside Shopping Centre, West Thurrock, Essex (01708 860077); The Angel Centre, Tonbridge, Kent (01732 771177); 19-23 South Street, Worthing, West Sussex (01903 231801). General inquiries (0181-546 2002). From Dec 27 for chargecard holders, Dec 28 general public.
Up to 50 per cent off most lines.

Deniers
High Street, Yeovil, Somerset (01935 444444). From Dec 27.
Up to 50 per cent off a wide range of men's and women's fashions and household goods.

ens cashmere mix coats were £495, sale price £325; short brown herring bone coat with velvet collar from £450 to £295; doe skin blazers from £375 to £250; men's blazers down from £295 to £195; men's double rain mac from £455 to £285.

Armando Pollini
35 Brook Street, W1 (0171-629 7606). From Dec 27 to early Feb.
From 30 to 50 per cent reductions: brown knee elastic boots from £199 to £139; black leather bag from £285 to £142.

Austin Reed
Branches nationwide (0800 585479). From Dec 27.
Menswear: barn coat from £169 to £99; 25 per cent off selected cotton shirts; half-price silk ties. Womenswear: taupe herringbone wool jacket from £249 to £179; selected pure wool knitwear from £49 to £29.95.

Benetton
Branches nationwide (0171-731 4557). From Dec 27.
Up to 50 per cent reductions.

Berluti
36 South Molton Street, W1 (0171-493 5033); 26 branches nationwide, inquiries (0171-935 2002). From Dec 21.

Selected items up to 50 per cent off, eg women's trenchcoats were £575, sale price £375; men's blazers were £325, sale price £185.

Burton
Branches nationwide (0321 287866). From Dec 27 for four weeks.
Many lines up to a third off.

C & A
Branches nationwide (0171-629 1244). From Dec 27, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Kilbride, Dec 26.
Up to 50 per cent discount on fashion for all the family.

Chanel
26 Old Bond Street, W1 (0171-493 5040); 31 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 6631). From Jan 4-11.
Minimum of 30 per cent off all ready-to-wear autumn/winter collection 1996 and a selection of shoes and accessories.

Country Casuals
1-5 Poland Street, W1 (0171-287 5181); branches nationwide (0121-212 2405). Sale now on.
Reductions up to 50 per cent. Jersey shirts were £39.95, sale price £19.95; burnt orange tweed jackets were £99.95, sale price £74.95; navy knit dresses were £65.95, sale price £45.95.



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was £19.75, sale price £9.95; Liberty print cushions were £35, sale price £25. Womenswear: Gucci silk hipster pants were £509, sale price £254; Issey Miyake quilt coat was £1,370, sale price £685; Gaultier skirts were £395, sale price £197; Vivienne Westwood navy wool cardigan was £139, sale price £69; Romeo Gigli velvet jacket was £755, sale price £377; Liberty orange wool jacket was £189, sale price £94.

Selfridges
Oxford Street, W1 (0171-629 1234). From Dec 27.
Up to 50 per cent off items throughout the store. Womenswear: Jasper Conran parent jacket down from £499 to £349; CK basic jeans down from £79 to £55; Polo Ralph Lauren selected lines up to 30 per cent off; Workers for Freedom shirt down from £195 to £136. Menswear: Paul Smith, Giorgio Armani Le Collezione and Calvin Klein selected lines up to 30 per cent off; selected YSL suits down from £325 to £225. Childrenswear: DKNY, Moschino, Versace and Armani selected lines all have 50 per cent off. China and crystal: Dartington crystal selected seconds 40 per cent off; Aynsley tableware selected seconds 33 per cent off. Linens and bathshop: Ralph

Hoopers
The Promenade, Cheltenham (01242 527505); North Street, Chichester, West Sussex (01243 533103); The Strand, Torquay (01803 212754); Mount Pleasant Road, Tunbridge Wells (01892 530222); Hoopers for Men, The Great Hall, Tunbridge Wells (01892 529223) and Alderley Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire (01625 525381); Allerton Road, Bradford (01274 491311); James Street, Harrogate (01423 504091). For further details freecall 0800 318216. From Dec 27-Jan 18.
Up to 50 per cent off womenswear, including designer labels such as Jasper Conran, Valentino, Moschino and Jean Muir. Also special bargains in the linen and china departments.

Amanda Wakeley
80 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-584 4009). From Jan 17.
From 30 to 50 per cent off daywear.

Aquascutum
100 Regent Street, W1 (0800 382922). From Dec 27.
From 30 to 50 per cent off selected lines throughout the store. Wom-

ankle boots were £75, sale price £45; loafers were £69.95, sale price £44.95; mock croc knee-length boots were £59.99, sale price £29.98.

Betty Jackson
311 Brompton Road, SW3 (0171-589 7884). From Dec 27-mid Jan.
All reductions are 50 per cent, eg black leather three-quarter length trench coat was £845, sale price £422; cashmere polo sweater was £599, sale price £298; wool mohair coat was £479, sale price £239.

Bhs
252-258 Oxford Street, W1 (0171-262 3288); 139 branches nationwide. From Dec 26 in Scotland, Dec 27 rest of UK.
A third off selected items across all departments.

Browns
23-27 South Molton Street, W1 (0171-491 7833). From Dec 27 while stocks last.
Up to 30 per cent off a wide selection of items.

Barberry
18-22 Haymarket, SW1; 165 Regent Street, W1 (0171-930 3343). From Dec 27.

Diesel
55 Argyle Street, WC1 (0171-833 2255). From Jan 2.
Up to 30 per cent reduction on seasonal items.

Donna Karan
19 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-495 3100). From Dec 27.
Discounts off selected items.

DKNY
27 Old Bond Street, W1 (0171-499 8089). From Dec 27.
Discounts up to 30 per cent off autumn/winter collection.

Dorothy Perkins
Branches nationwide (0171-291 2604). From Dec 26 (Scotland), Dec 27 rest of UK for four weeks.
Many items at half-price.

Emporio Armani
191 Brompton Road, SW3 (0171-823 8818); 57-59 Long Acre, WC2 (0171-917 6882); 112a New Bond Street, W1 (0171-491 8080); 84-86 King Street, Manchester M2 (0161-839 8789); 19 John Street, The Italian Centre, Glasgow G1 (0141-552 2277). From Dec 27; Manchester and Glasgow branches Dec 28.
Reductions from 25 per cent.

... from designer labels to tables. When push comes to shove, Caroline Griffiths has an eye for the best buys

□ **Episode**
172 Regent Street, W1 (0171-439 3561) and branches nationwide (0171-589 4279). Sale now on. Leather jacket from £499 to £349; leather skirts from £199 to £139; 100 per cent wool coats from £299 to £209.

□ **French Connection**
249 Regent Street, W1, and branches nationwide (0171-580 2507). From Dec 27. Up to 50 per cent off selected items.

□ **Georges Reck**
181-182 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 3343). Also Fenwick, Harrods Harvey Nichols and Selfridges. From Dec 27. Up to 20 per cent off eveningwear and 50 per cent off shoes.

□ **Gianni Versace**
34-35 Old Bond Street, W1 (0171-499 1862); Italian Centre, Glasgow (0141-552 6510). From Jan 8. Thirty per cent off selected stock.

□ **Giorgio Armani**
37 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 6232). From Dec 27. No more details at time of going to press.

□ **Hennes**
261-271 Regent Street, W1 (0171-493 4004). Other branches: Brent Cross, Marble Arch, Kingston upon Thames, Harrow, Croydon, Watford, Wimbledon and nationwide. Inquiries: 0171-255 2031. From Dec 23. Discounts up to 50 per cent.

Up to 50 per cent off a range of classic jackets, tops and bodies; 30 per cent off selected jumpers and belts.

□ **Ken Lane**
30 Burlington Arcade, W1 (0171-499 1364) and 58 Beauchamp Place, SW3 (0171-584 1985). From Dec 27-Jan 31. Up to 50 per cent off a wide selection of items.

□ **Kingshill Mail Order**
For copies of the Kingshill British Designer Collections catalogue and the Diffusion catalogue (£11 or £10 for a subscription, which is refunded if you place an order) call 01494 890555, or fax 01494 866003. Sale now on.

From now, 30 per cent off all designer styles in both catalogues; from Jan 2 until Jan 20, the reductions will increase to 50 per cent and will also include a selection of items from the Christmas catalogue.

□ **Kookai**
123 Kensington High Street, W8; 25 branches nationwide, inquiries 0171-937 4411. From Dec 27. Up to 30 per cent discount on selected items.

□ **Lillywhites**
24-36 Regent Street, SW1 (0171-915 4000). Eight branches nationwide. From Dec 27. Discounts on many lines at 25-50 per cent off.

Up to 50 per cent off autumn/winter collection: Josephine floral print long dress from £70 to £34.97; Aran cardigans from £60 to £34.95; beaded trim twinsets from £39.95 to £24.95; velvet evening dress from £85 to £55.

□ **Mailberry**
41-42 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-491 4323); 185 Brompton Road, SW1 (0171-225 0313); 25-25 Swingate, York (01904 611055). From Dec 27-Jan 11. Up to 50 per cent off selected items.

□ **Muji**
26 Great Marlborough Street, W1 (0171-494 1197). From Dec 27. Bedlinen: XL duvet cover was £39.95, sale price £26.

□ **Next**
Three hundred branches nationwide. Inquiries 0116-284 9424. From Dec 27 for two weeks. Up to 50 per cent off most items.

□ **Nicole Farhi**
158 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-499 8368); 193 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 0877); 12 Floral Street, WC2 (0171-497 8713); 25-25 St Christopher's Place, W1 (0171-495 5166); 27 Hempstead High Street, NW3 (0171-435 0866). From now until mid-Jan. Up to 40 per cent reductions on selected items.

□ **Nougat**
Nougat at Fenwick, Brent Cross Shopping Centre (0181-202 4500). From Dec 27. Up to 30 per cent off selected items.

DAVID JUMPER

8200; House of Fraser, Metro Centre, Gateshead (0191-493 2424); Bins of Middlesbrough (01642 246571); Guilty by Design, Edinburgh (0131-447 8187); Great Clothes Ltd, Leeds (0113-235 0800) and Jill Black, Barton Arcade, Manchester (0161-834 5160). From Dec 27. Up to 50 per cent of selected items including angora sweaters; shantung silk shirts and suits; shift dresses and belted jackets.

□ **Oasis**
292 Regent Street, W1, and branches nationwide (0171-452 1000). From Dec 26 until end Jan. Up to 50 per cent off selected items. Tan suede jacket from £109.99 to £69.99; black leather jeans from £59.99 to £49.99; small leather dispatch bag from £48.99 to £22.99; red crepe suit jacket was £89.99, sale price £59.99.

□ **Osh Kosh B'Gosh**
17 Kings Road, SW3 (0171-730 1341). From Dec 23. Up to 50 per cent off selected merchandise.

□ **Patrick Cox**
8 Symons Street, SW3 (0171-730 6504). Patrick Cox Wannabe, 129 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-730 9888). From Dec 28 until end Jan. Up to 40 per cent off men's shoes and 30 per cent off ladies'; 40 per cent off diffusion lines and 60 per cent off Wannabes.

□ **Paul Smith**
40-44 Floral Street, WC2; 10 Byard Lane, Nottingham (0115-250 6712); 66-68 Bridge Street, Manchester (0161-831 9111). Inquiries 0171-379 7133. Paul Smith Jeans, 9-11 Langley Court, WC2. From Jan 10 at London branches and Nottingham. From Jan 4 at Manchester. Discounts up to 30 per cent for three weeks.

□ **Praha**
43-45 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 0008). Up to 30 per cent off autumn/winter collections.

□ **Ravel**
184-188 Oxford Street, W1 (0171-436 3126) and branches nationwide (0171-631 0224). Sale now on. From 25 to 40 per cent reductions. Suede loafers with snaffle were £29.99, sale price £20; high-heeled satin sandals were £49.99, sale price £29; grey beaded satin high-heeled court shoes were £39.99, sale price £29.

□ **Red or Dead**
1 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 1335). From Dec 27. Up to 40 per cent off all stock. Suede high boots were £125, sale price £75; long print kaftans were £110, sale price £66; black suede boots were £89, sale price £55.

□ **Reiss**
The Reiss Building, 114 Kings Road, SW3; 116 Long Acre, WC2; 245 Regent Street, W1; and branches in Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow (0171-235 4600). From Dec 27. Up to 50 per cent off a selection of items.

□ **River Island**
Branches nationwide (0181-998 8822). From Dec 27. Up to 50 per cent off a selection of items.

□ **Russell & Bromley**
24-25 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-933 7954); 41 branches nationwide. Inquiries (0171-629 6903). From Dec 20. Discounts from 30-50 per cent until mid-January.

□ **The Scotch House**
2 Brompton Road, Knightsbridge, SW1; 84-86 Regent Street, W1; 39-41 Princes Street, Edinburgh (0171-581 2151). From Dec 27.

Up to 40 per cent off a wide selection of items. Ladies' cashmere round-neck cardigan was £195, sale price £139; men's cashmere V-neck sweater was £195, sale price £139; cashmere scarves were £45, down to £29.95.

□ **Simpson Piccadilly**
203 Piccadilly, W1. Customer Inquiries (0800 288188). From Dec 27-Jan 25. Half-price collection includes Mondri, Amanda Wakeley, Louis Feraud, Louise Kennedy, Synonym and Antoinette. Up to 50 per cent off YSL, Valentino, Guy Laroche, Paul Costelloe, Fink, Simpson Collection, Betty Barclay, Pringle, Geiger, Weekend by Maxmara and Four Seasons. In addition there will be an extra 10 per cent off on Dec 27, 9-10am, and all day Dec 29.

□ **Snow and Rock**
188 Kensington High Street, W8 (0171-937 0872); 8 Grays Inn Road, WC1 (0171-831 6900); St Albans Hill, Hemel Hempstead, Herts (0442 235305); 14 Priory Queensway, Birmingham (0121-256 8280); Vale Road, Parkwood Springs, Sheffield (0114-255 1700). Enquiries: 01932 569569. From Dec 26 or Dec 27, check branch for details. Discounts up to 30 per cent off skiwear and accessories. Goode Tiger 9103 ski poles from £79.95 to £59.95; Rollerblade Tarmac from £219.95 to £179.95; Nordica Vertech 75 men's boots from £169.95 to £99.95; Nordica Vertech 65 ladies boots from £139.95 to £89.95; Rossignol V2C skis with Salomon Q600 bindings from £214 to £114.

□ **The Rack**
487 Oxford Street, W1; 49 Regent Street, W1, and branches nationwide (0181-230 2333). From Dec 26 (London stores) and Dec 27 (nationwide) until Jan 26. Up to 50 per cent off selected items.

□ **Timberland**
72 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-495 2139). Inquiries (0345 669988). From Dec 27. Up to 25 per cent discount.

□ **Valentino**
174 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 5855); Miss Valentino, 160 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-493 2698). From now until end Jan. Up to 40 per cent off women'swear and 30 per cent off menswear.

□ **Vivienne Westwood**
6 Davies Street, W1 (0171-629 3757); 43 Conduit Street, W1 (0171-499 1109); World's End, 430 King's Road, SW10 (0171-352 6551). From early January. No details at going to press.

□ **Wallis**
217 Oxford Street, W1, and branches nationwide (0181-910 1533). From Dec 23. Up to 50 per cent off selected items.

□ **Warehouse**
9-21 Argyl Street, W1 (0171-437 7101); 75 branches nationwide. Inquiries 0171-278 3491. From Dec 27. Discounts of up to half-price on party wear, tailoring and jewellery.

□ **Watches of Switzerland**
16 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-493 5916); branches nationwide (0171-931 7171). From Dec 27. Up to 50 per cent off a wide range of famous Swiss watches including Tag Heuer, Omega, Breitling.

Longines and Ebel. Gents bi-colour Omega bracelet watch was £995, sale price £497; Gents steel and yellow metal Breitling Chronological was £2365, sale price £1,773.75; Ladies titanium Conquest bracelet watch was £695, sale price £347.

□ **Whistles**
12-14 St Christopher's Place, W1, and branches nationwide (0171-487 4484). From Dec 27. From 25 to 50 per cent off selected items.

□ **Yves Saint Laurent rive gauche Femme**
33 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 6706); 135 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-493 1800). From Dec 27. Up to 40 per cent off all autumn/winter stock.

HOMES AND INTERIORS

□ **Bridgewater/Matthew Rice**
789 Fulham Road, SW6 (0171-371 9033). From Jan 8-25, open on Jan 12 midday-4pm. 4th Floor Harvey Nichols. From Jan 27. At least 40 per cent off pottery, glass, cookware, linens, seconds and samples. Discontinued stationery lines 50 per cent off.

□ **The Conran Shop**
Michelin House, 81 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-589 7401). From Jan 4 for two weeks or while stocks last. Reductions of 30 per cent on ex-display upholstery and furniture. Generous reductions on discontinued ranges throughout the shop. Bargains in damaged goods and samples.

□ **C.P. Hart**
Newham Terrace, Hercules Road, SE1 (0171-902 1000). From Jan 18 for two weeks. Up to one third off bathroom products and accessories includes cast-iron roll-top bath for £295, reduced from £450.

□ **Damask**
3-4 Brookholme House, New King's Road, SW6 (0171-731 3553). From Jan 8. From 25 to 50 per cent off selected nightwear, gifts and home furnishings.

□ **David Mellor**
4 Sloane Square, SW1 (0171-730 4259). From Jan 4-18. Ten per cent discount on all standard merchandise, 20 per cent discount on most ranges of David Mellor cutlery and up to 90 per cent discount on slightly damaged or shop-soiled merchandise.

□ **Descamps**
197 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 6957). From Dec 27 for three weeks. Up to 30 per cent off bed linen and bathrobes, including a double duvet cover reduced from £149 to £103.90 and pillowcases reduced from £33.90 to £22.90.

□ **Designers Guild Store**
267 Kings Road, SW3 (0171-243 7300). From Jan 11-25. Discounts on fabric, upholstery, bedlinen, wallpaper, tableware and accessories.

□ **Designers Guild Warehouse**
6 Relay Road, Ariel Way off Wood Lane, W12. From Jan 18-26. (Sale hotline: 0171-243 7343.) Only fabric and wallpaper are available at the Warehouse.

□ **Divertimenti**
45-47 Wigmore Street, W1 (0171-435 0699); 30-41 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-581 8065). From Jan 11-25. Fifty per cent discount on Quimper traditional hand-painted Breton china and 40 per cent off Pilluvit Whiteware. Also bargains on slight seconds.

□ **General Trading Company**
144 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-730 0411); 10 Argyle Street, Bath (01225 461500); 3-4 Dyer Street, Cirencester (01285 652314). From Jan 4-25. Reductions of up to 50 per cent on merchandise throughout shop, including San Marco range of Italian ceramics.

□ **Graham & Green**
4, 7 and 10 Elgin Crescent, W11 (0171-227 4594). From Jan 3-31. Wrought-iron three-seater sofa complete with cushions reduced from £1,357 to half-price, and a Dutch pine wardrobe reduced by £300 to £465; 25 per cent off all kilims, rugs and runners; 20 per cent off Davenport china seconds. Mulberry personal accessories range has 20 per cent off.

□ **Habitat**
Forty stores nationwide (0645 334433). From Dec 27. Furniture: 50 per cent saving on metal/Formica-topped folding regatta table in blue and up to 30 per cent off sofas made to order in any fabric; 30 per cent off Border bedlinen and 20 per cent off Matarang 5ft metal bed. Kitchenware: 50 per cent off Fruit Garden embossed dinnerware range and 50 per cent off Somerset glassware range.

□ **Heal's**
196 Tottenham Court Road, W1; 234 King's Road, SW3; Tunsgate, Guildford, Surrey (0171-636 1666). From Dec 27-Jan 19. Reductions in all departments with up to 20 per cent off most normal stock dining tables, chairs, occasional tables and upholstery; 30 per cent off selected cookware, canteens of cutlery and clear glass vases; 50 per cent off discontinued linens and all basketware at Tottenham Court Road.

□ **The Holding Company**
243-245 Kings Road, SW3 (0171-352 1600; mail order 0171-610 9160). From Dec 27-Jan 11. Ten per cent off all chrome racking and Alpha shelving systems; 20 per cent off all canvas storage products, fabric covered boxes and children's plastic storage items.

□ **Jane Churchill**
151 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-730 9847); Liberty, Regent Street, W1 (0171-734 1234); 3A Christopher Place, St Albans, Hertfordshire (01727 860293); 13 Fitzroy Street, Cambridge (01223 323211). From Dec 27 in Liberty and Dec 28 in other stores. Twenty-five per cent off selected imperfect fabrics and wallpapers, 30 per cent off selected bedlinen, reductions on all upholstered furniture orders and up to 50 per cent off selected decorative accessories, ceramics, lighting, lampshades, glassware and gift items.

□ **Jerry's Home Store**
163 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-581 0809); 57 Heath Street, Hampstead, NW3 (0171-794 8622); The Bentall Centre, Kingston upon Thames, southwest London (0181-549 5393); Home on Four, Harvey Nichols, Knightsbridge, SW1 (0171-245 6251). From Dec 27 (Dec 26 in Kingston), Smart Buys start on Jan 8 until end Feb. Fifty per cent off selected items including linen throws from £75 to £37.50 and one third off other items such as Signum Swedish stainless steel cutlery and selected kitchen gadgets.

□ **The Monogrammed Linen Shop**
168 Walton Street, SW3 (0171-589 4033) and Harvey Nichols. From Jan 2 (Dec 27 in Harvey Nichols) until end Jan. Cotton bedlinen reduced by 20 per cent including Peter Reed, Oliver DesForges, French Linen Company and Jesurim. Assorted designs of towels reduced by 20 per cent plus others.

□ **Paperchase**
213 Tottenham Court Road, W1, plus 11 other shops nationwide; for nearest branch: 0171-580 8496. From Dec 27 to end Jan. One third off selected Christmas stock. Knockdown prices on some summer furniture including chairs, candlesticks, vases, stacking boxes, rugs. Large seagrass woven rug reduced to £5.

□ **The Pier**
Stores nationwide; for nearest branch: 0171-637 7001. From Dec 27-Jan 19. Price reductions range from 20 to 50 per cent, including Shaker dining chair in green reduced from £75 to £59, Savannah wicker furniture 20 per cent off and Ticking Stripe blue and white porcelain 25 per cent off.

□ **Purves & Purves**
80-81 and 83 Tottenham Court Road, W1 (0171-590 8223). From Dec 26-Jan 23. Up to 40 per cent off ex-display furniture, 10 per cent off any single item over £500 and 50 per cent off discontinued lines of accessories.

□ **SCP Furniture Ltd**
135-139 Curtain Road, EC2 (0171-739 1869). From Jan 4-Feb 1. Up to 50 per cent discounts on floor samples; discounts of up to 15 per cent on all items ordered during sale.

□ **Simon Horn Furniture Ltd**
117-121 Wandsworth Bridge Road, SW6 (0171-731 1279). From Jan 2-31. Up to 35 per cent off selected beds and 10 per cent off all orders placed during sale; one third off 78 per cent mohair blankets in three colourways; ash four-poster beds from £2,820 to £1,990 and metal four posters from £2,352 to £1,452.

□ **Smallbone of Devizes**
105-109 Fulham Road, SW3 (0171-581 9889). From Dec 28-Jan 31. Substantial reductions on bespoke kitchens, bedroom and bathroom products.

□ **The Source**
36-40 Kensington High Street, W8 (0171-938 2636); Lakeside Retail Park, West Thurrock, Essex (01708 890253); 10 Harbour Parade, Southampton (01703 336141). From Dec 27. Up to 50 per cent off selected lines. Egyptian cotton duvet set from £19.95 to £9.95; Ashima bedspread from £35.95 to £17.95; double patchwork quilts were £79.95, sale price £39.95; single patchwork quilts were £69.95, sale price £34.95; bath towels were £10.95, sale price £5.95; Horrocks bath sheets were £10.50, sale price £8.40; Horrocks hand towels were £3.50, sale price £2.80; washed duvets were £89.95, sale price £44.95; ribbed cushions were £8.95, sale price £4.45; gingham kitchen aprons were £5.75, sale price £2.85.

□ **White House**
51 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-629 3521). Dec 29 preview; sale Jan 2 for two weeks. Fifteen per cent off all stock in all departments; 20 per cent off women's fashions with some merchandise reduced by up to 50 per cent.

● **Information correct at time of going to press. Dates and reductions may change at short notice. Please check with specific shops before making a special trip.**

● **Additional research by Alex Wijeratne**



□ **Hermès**
179 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-823 1014); 155 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-499 8856). From Jan 11-18. Selected menswear and womenswear at sale prices.

□ **Jaeger**
200-206 Regent Street, W1 (0171-200 4000). 100 stores nationwide, general inquiries (0171-200 4211). From Dec 27. Discounts from 17-55 per cent. Camel cashmere stole from £169 to £99; suede gloves with zebra cuffs from £49 to £24.50; Jaeger London wool mix coat from £350 to £249; Jaeger London brown belted jacket from £320 to £219; brown wide leg trouser from £140 to £89.

□ **Joseph**
26 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 5470); 23 Old Bond Street, W1 (0171-629 3713); 28 Brook Street, W1 (0171-629 6077); 124 Draycott Avenue, SW3 (0171-225 0364); 77 Fulham Road, SW3, and general inquiries (0171-823 9500). From Dec 27. Reductions 30 per cent or more.

□ **Karen Millen**
Branches nationwide (01622 664032). From Dec 26.

□ **Marks & Spencer**
Marble Arch, Oxford Street, W1 (0171-933 7954); 286 branches nationwide, inquiries 0171-935 4422. From Dec 27. Moorgate branch not included. End of season clearance.

□ **Maxmara**
32 Sloane Street, SW1 (0171-235 7941); 153 New Bond Street, W1 (0171-491 4748). From Jan 4. Up to 20-40 per cent off Maxmara and Sportmax. Grey woolen/cashmere suit from £413 to £249; fake fur coat from £768 to £459; violet velvet dress from £705 to £489; cream boot cut trousers from £98 to £79.

□ **Miss Selfridge**
Branches nationwide: 0181-910 1359. From Dec 27. Up to 55 per cent off selected jackets, ponteroma jacket was £55, sale price £25; £10 off tailored trousers; half-price selected coloured suede trousers, now £40; 40 per cent off selected coloured suede safari-style jackets; velvet side-split skirts were £35, sale price £15; half-price quilted jackets, fur collar parkas were £40, sale price £20.

□ **Monsoon**
Branches nationwide (0171-313 3000). From Dec 27.

MANCHESTER SHOP BY TRAM

Holiday tips for all those party animals

James Allcock, The Times vet, offers valuable advice for the festive season

When it comes to Christmas, most animals agree with Scrooge — the sooner it's over, the better, and they can get back to their daily routine.

It is not just pets who have a hard time: pigeons living on crumbs falling from commuters' sandwiches go hungry when main line stations are deserted. Urban foxes find less to eat when takeaways are closed and office and factory cats have to make do with an extra few saucers of milk to see them over the holiday. Fortunate school pets will go home with one of the pupils. Those left in classrooms will be lonely, and cold if the heating is set low to save fuel.

Farm animals do better. Many are indoors at this time of year and routine feeding and watering goes on as usual. Dairy cows have to be milked whether it is Christmas or not, providing the milk you will be drinking next weekend.

My son's ewes started lambing last week. He's on 24 hour watch. I'm on stand-by for emergency sheep midwifery duty.

But what about pets? Try to keep to their regular timetable. Getting up four hours later than normal puts an excessive strain on any dog's bladder. He needs his daily walk — don't miss out because it's Christmas. But if he is getting on in years and usually goes a gentle mile or so to the pub, don't take him for a four-hour hike — you'll both be stiff and sore on Boxing Day.

If your pet's supper time is 5pm, don't make it wait until you have finished dinner and done the washing-up. Tiny bits of ham or turkey, a tablespoon of cream and a couple of chocolate drops won't hurt any dog or cat. But keep it at that. Don't leave chocolates on the sofa overnight or a jug of cream within car-lapping distance. A pound of chocolates can be a lethal dose for a medium-sized dog and if the cat drinks too much cream there will be a nasty mess to clear up the next morning.

There are plenty of safety requirements about children's toys, but hardly any about gifts for pets. Dogs are mainly at risk. They'll chew and swallow plastics and they have been operated on to recover the squeak from the toy mouse given to the cat. Small, hard rubber balls can be dangerous. An over-excited dog jumps to catch it, mouth wide open, and the ball is small enough to lodge at the back of the throat and kill the dog. An inch larger than a tennis ball is the minimum safe size.

Lively parties may also pose problems. Make sure there's a quiet spot so your pet can retire

from the fray. If your budgie lives anywhere near the kitchen, beware of non-stick pans when you forget to take them off the heat and they boil dry. Fumes from these pans have killed a number of birds. Fish are not totally safe if the party turns into a rave. An unwanted vodka or cigarette end dropped into an aquarium makes the water uninhabitable. Close-fitting tank tops are essential. And when the party is over, check that no one has switched off the heater or filter.

If pet-loving but petless children are guests, do not let dogs, cats, guinea pigs, rabbits, gerbils or rats be overwhelmed with embraces. Don't worry too much about hamsters. Every one I have handled has made his feelings crystal clear by biting the hand that holds it.

Dogs and cats belonging to elderly aunts may not appreciate children, so when Great Aunt is visiting it would be kind to suggest the pets in her life are tucked away before the children descend.

One post-Christmas question that crops up every year is what to do with the turkey/chicken/goose/duck carcass. It is linked with the worry about chicken bones piercing a dog's intestines. I do not believe this has ever happened. There is no mention of it in reputable veterinary literature. My dogs have had chicken bones for at least 40 years without trouble.

Foxes, rural and urban, eat plenty of chicken bones cooked or killed and eaten raw. Their intestines are indistinguishable from a dog's. I'm not recommending poultry bones for dogs, however, and certainly don't give leftover turkey skin — explosive diarrhoea often follows. A better destination for Christmas leftovers is food for wild birds. The fatty bits can be a life saver in cold weather. The wire mesh hanging basket that is filled with fuchsias, lobelia and petunias in summer can do all-year-round duty, swinging from a tree, holding poultry remains and bones of any other sort. But, once a wild-bird feeding station is opened it must be kept open until late spring. If food supplies fail, some of the birds saved in January will die before Valentine's Day. Bird tables, window ledge feeders or bags of peanuts must be kept topped up.

Christmas charity should include your vet. Not money or even alcohol, but consideration. There will be someone on duty if a real emergency occurs, but don't ask for a repeat prescription at lunchtime on Christmas Day, when he is already booked to perform delicate surgery on the roast turkey.



James Allcock with his grandson James, aged three, and Finty the Staffordshire bull terrier. Dogs need extra care at Christmas



Tiny has become inseparable from his friend

ADOPT ME

BRUNO is a 12-year-old black Labrador with a grey muzzle. Tiny is a two-year-old white and tan Jack Russell who has become inseparable from Bruno. Both dogs have a good temperament, are in good health and need to be rehomed together. As Bruno is an older dog, he has been placed under the National Canine Defence League's fostering scheme, which means that any vet fees will be met by the NCDF. Contact the NCDF, Rescue Centre, 60 Tees Road, Ballymena, County Antrim, Northern Ireland BT43 5PN (01266 652977).



All Bruno's vet's bills will be met by the charity

A VET WRITES

Q Our grandson, Charles, who is nearly ten, wants a pet rat. He is fascinated by them. Do you think he is old enough to have one for Christmas? His parents are unenthusiastic, but resigned.

A Charles is just about old enough, but Christmas is the worst possible time to introduce a new pet. Too many other things are going on. Buy him a book about rat keeping and enrol him as a member of the National Fancy Rat Society. Juvenile membership costs £6 and the membership co-ordinator is Davida Krill, 14 Clayhall House, Somers Close, Reigate, Surrey RH2 9EB.

You could also give him an IOU for two rats not to be cashed until April 1997 and only if he has learnt all about rat keeping. The Easter holidays, when summer follows, are a much better time to start any new animal venture.

Q Lucky, our cat, was hit by a car six weeks ago, and now his tail is paralysed and just drags behind. He has no other injuries so perhaps he was lucky. Our vet says there is no hope of the tail recovering and it should be amputated. Why? Lucky does not worry about his non-working tail.

A Lucky does not worry about his paralysed tail because he does not know it is there. So he won't realise if it catches alight when he gets too close to an electric fire and it could become trapped in a door without him knowing about it.

Less spectacularly, the paralysed tail will drag on the ground, get damaged, dirty and in time become gangrenous. It is much better to operate now, on a healthy cat, than have an emergency later when (un)Lucky has developed blood poisoning.

Q When I was very young — I have been a senior citizen for more than ten years — I remember my grandfather's dogs always had a lump of sulphur in their water bowl. He swore by it and I never knew any of his dogs to be ill. I thought I would try it for my cross-bred spaniel but no one seems to have heard of it.

A I remember rock sulphur but don't believe it ever did any good — and no harm either. These lumps of sulphur are totally insoluble in water and the piece your grandfather bought could have remained in the water bowl until today, without changing shape or size.

The dogs cannot get anything from it. Sulphur was, and still is, an effective treatment for mange, but that is when it is in a semi-soluble form and applied to the coat. Specialist laboratory chemical supplies might stock rock sulphur, but it is hardly worth the trouble of searching.

JAMES ALLCOCK

Readers should write to The Times Vet, Weekend, The Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9RN. Advice is offered without legal responsibility.

Migraine? I've had a brainwave

ALTERNATIVELY SPEAKING

For technophobes like me, Peter Bartlett qualifies as an electronics wizard.

When I asked for a copy of his CV, he tapped into his personal organiser and out it came, which is unsurprising given that he uses a space-age electronic therapy known as Empulse and waxes eloquent about technology as the interface between conventional and alternative medicine.

Empulse is a thing, not a therapy: watch-sized, white, plastic and lithium battery-operated, it looks like a powder-puff case. It can be worn in a pocket, clipped to clothes, strapped like a watch or hung around your neck — through this will entail you giving constant explanations. At night you slip it under your pillow.

It was invented a decade ago by 37-year-old Steven Walpole, a former BT and IBM electronic engineer, who at first named the device Medigen and spent 12 years refining it. He had suffered searing migraines for years, which worsened after a car crash. He claims the attacks have all but ended since he started using the renamed Empulse.

The practice is simple — you wear the gadget. The theory is equally simple when summarised, but devilishly complicated when you get into talk of "delta" and "theta" frequencies and the mechanisms of how the thing works.

All activity in the body is controlled by brain waves variously called alpha, beta, delta, theta and other waves. The device produces a selection of these waves to promote, for example, relaxation thanks to alpha waves, or pain control thanks to theta waves. In theory, Empulse pumps out minute electromagnetic impulses every 12.7 seconds that boost the electrical impulses in

the brain which are supposed to be deficient. Abnormal electrical impulses in the brain can cause physical ailments, they say, so correct the impulses and you correct the ailment. Each device is programmed following a scan of the sufferer's brainwaves. Empulse is particularly used for those suffering from the headaches from hell and that means women — four times as many women as men get migraines. Many doctors believe that migraines are caused when the brain's alpha and theta waves drop to below certain levels.

I saw Mr Bartlett at his Reading clinic. He trained as an osteopath and still practises, but his technological bent meant that Empulse intrigued him. He spent an initial 16 hours learning how to use the equipment and takes part in continuous training every two



RACHEL KELLY

months. He has treated 50 patients in the past year. Treatment began with a consultation to discuss my headaches, then he slipped a Brain Frequency Analyser, which is rather like a slimline pair of headphones, over my head for three minutes to analyse my brain frequencies. No, it is not connected to any direct currents. The result looks like a graph from a maths lesson: power up the

left-hand column, and frequency along the bottom divided into "delta", "theta", "alpha" and "beta": the frequency bands claimed to be linked to the physiological conditions which Empulse can relieve. Delta frequencies are associated with the subconscious and unconscious states, and deficiencies would be shown by insomnia. Theta frequencies are linked to creative thought; alpha frequencies with control of muscles.

Mr Bartlett noticed that I had a couple of "theta" and "alpha" frequencies which were lower than average, indicating muscular stress. The game was to programme my Empulse to correct them.

My particular frequency boosters would help to reduce muscle tension and stress, which in turn were causing my headaches, he said. The trouble is I have no idea if it is

working or not. True, I have had fewer headaches recently but then I never had the mind-splitting migraines which are a better litmus test of Empulse's efficacy. Therapists recommend that you wear Empulse for three months for the best results, with a consultation to adapt the frequencies after six weeks depending on your symptoms.

The manufacturers say trials last year found that 82 per cent of 265 migraine sufferers who responded to a survey reported a significant improvement after using the gadget. Almost a third said they felt perfectly well for the first time in years.

Dr George Lewith, from the Centre for the Study of Complementary Medicine in Southampton, describes the research as promising but not definitive. A second trial at the Koestler Foundation in London, supervised by the Queen's Physician, Dr Ronald Davey, in 1993 tested the response of 67 patients. The majority reported fewer migraine attacks.

It seems pricey: the first one-hour consultation costs £40; each month's trial purchase costs £15 and the subsequent re-analysis and reset consultation costs £20. If you go ahead and buy the gadget, it costs £160, discounted by £10 for each month of paid trial. Mr Bartlett counters, however, that this is nothing compared to the cost of drugs for migraine-sufferers.

● Peter Bartlett is on 01754 344203. Medical Devices and Instrumentation (MDI) at Cobble Yard, St Nicholas Street, Diss, Norfolk IP22 3LB (01379 644234) manufactures Empulse and keeps a list of all UK practitioners.



A migraine sufferer learns about the Empulse action



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Blonde and pouting nanny wanted

PERSONAL LIFE

When the other half dramatically disappears, with manifestly no idea of returning, priority No 1 is a childminder. I toy with the idea of an au pair. With my working hours it would have a distinct advantage. Antonia and Joanna give it the thumbs down.

"Where would she sleep?" Antonia demands. "I want my own room, like all my friends." Jo looks at me soulfully. "Do we really have to have someone living here?" "Most au pairs only come here to get boyfriends anyway," adds Antonia pointedly. "Eve Abrams says they don't lift a finger."

"She might try and boss us around when you're not here," murmurs Jo. "Okay, okay," I recall. Antonia is not going to budge on the territorial issue. Jo's

not ready for a mother substitute. So how do you set about getting a childminder? Are there agencies for this sort of thing? What sort of people are childminders? Is it a registered profession or are we talking about exploited teenage and OAP labour? My neighbours are short of ideas; even the usually together Eve can only suggest "Do what I did and put an ad in the paper".

It sounds fearfully hit and miss. Nevertheless, *Childminder wanted* for two daughters, 8 and 10, of beleaguered male. Help with homework as important as housework. Hours 4-8 to 11-13, but sometimes later. I thought, it rather witty. The girl in the small ad department of the local Twickenham paper read it without

amusement. Antonia and Jo are chuffed about being advertised in the paper. They have some idea it confers celebrity status on them. I've told them the paper doesn't come out until tomorrow, but they're in and out of the newsagents all day — for sweets.

It works! The phone hasn't stopped ringing. After the first half-dozen calls I felt a small glow of complacency. Another dozen and that feeling gives way to panic. Is there more to this than meets the eye? Might there be child molesters among this lot? I feel you ought to have had more training in this kind of thing.

I knew it! It's dangerous adver-

tising your vulnerabilities. I had the most unnerving phone call tonight. A man. Male.

27. Had just come out of the Army after three-and-a-half years. (Why, may I ask? I mean, no one serves for three-and-a-half years, do they?) He had had some "problems" but they were behind him now. (Well, that's a relief!) He had seen the light and was training for the priesthood. A definite case of don't call us, we'll call you.

Antonia wonders why I burst into a hysterical cackle when she asks me if "anyone interesting" has called. My interview technique lacks finesse, but I'm trying to learn. People are throwing themselves at me from all quarters. One is from way out by Heathrow. I didn't know the paper circulated

that far. Me: How will you get here from that distance? Her: By bus. Me: But the service is terrible. Her: I'll try to manage. Try to? That's not much help to me.

This is depressing. I've had 33 calls. Not one raises a flicker of a right feeling in me. Most of them seem barely able to cope with their own lives, let alone anyone else's.

Then, at last! A candidate I feel confidence in. Mrs Harris, 50, bustling, bright and friendly. Stacks of references. Good ones, too, from posh addresses on Richmond Hill. Mustn't jump the gun. I will wait 24 hours before making my decision. But just as I am about to lift the phone to give Mrs Harris the all-clear, another candidate presents herself.

1. Mrs Harris has to come from Kew. Mandy lives just round the

corner. I'd worry about Mrs H getting home at night.

2. Mrs H can cook, but rather old-fashioned, ie lots of bangers and beans. Mandy's mentioned tagliatelle and stuffed peppers.

3. Mrs H has good references. Mandy has references.

4. Mrs H didn't actually say anything about doing housework; whereas Mandy volunteered "if you get in a jam". Young people do have a more, well, flexible spirit.

5. Mrs H turned up five minutes early for her interview. Mandy an hour late.

6. Mrs H has the experience. But isn't there some advantage for practically pubescent girls in having someone like a mate to confide in and talk fashion to?

7. Mrs H is nearly 60. Mandy is 19, blonde, blue-eyed and has a Brigitte Bardot pout.

A tough decision? Who am I trying to kid?

PETER DAVIES

There's no escape, just play the game

Be it charades or the vicar's cat — games come into their own at Christmas, says

Jill Parkin

There's something odd about the British Christmas. During the weeks between ending, we're often stuck in a room with several people we haven't seen for 364 days. We must have stacks to talk about. What do we do? We start playing games madly, thus avoiding any real conversation for another year.

I married into a family of games players, a shock for someone brought up with only an incomplete set of Kan-Go cards. (Mind you, it made me into a passable Scrabble player, which came in handy during those long dark evenings of courting.)

I am notorious among my in-laws for having to have Snap explained to me twice. So when I came back home one Christmas from a four-day assignment in post-revolutionary Romania, their annual orgy had quite slipped my mind. All I wanted was a gin and a loving hand to help me out of the waxed jacket I'd been all but sleeping in. But hardened games players hardly ever drink, and their hands are usually folding bits of paper. It was "Hi, Jill!" and back to their substitute for real social intercourse. So I went, via Belgrade and the family flour game, smoothly from *Casseuse* to murder in the dark. Not much difference.

But like the Boxing Day walk and the pounds of nuts you wouldn't dream of buying normally, games — board games, word games, moving-about-the-room games — are an inevitable part of Christmas. You can't escape. There are people out there, and in the sitting room with you, who plan this months ahead.

A friend of mine, a radio news editor, cuts out headlines all year round, just for her new year party game. She actually practises the flour game the day before her family do. She turns the flour out of a bowl and stands in her kitchen, carefully cutting slices off the flour dome without letting the chocolate topple off.



Board games, word games and moving-about-the-room games — they are an inevitable part of a British Christmas. There will be people in the sitting room with you who planned this ritual months ahead

You never know if the games your family plays are normal. Everyone plays charades and consequences. But what about up-Jenkins, and the vicar's cat? Mine only by marriage, you understand. Those oldies who are always telling us "in my day we used to make our own entertainment" should get down and play up-Jenkins. Real DIY fun, that is. It makes flicking the remote seem like an intellectual challenge.

Still, a young games-hating Cambridge don I met at a wedding admitted: "You can have a good substitute with that word game where you have to guess which is the right meaning. I once did mooli, and gave them the choice between a rudely shaped vegetable, a Hindu word for the female sex organ as an object of veneration, and the Irish festival of the cow. They all went for the sex organ. I think that tells you a lot about how repressed

games players are. A lot of them are people who went to children's parties and never got the parcel. Winning matters so much to them that even games of complete chance or laughable skill can become a triumph to them."

One has to be charitable to games players, then. This is their one chance to shine. Anyway they've got us, and plenty of pencils and paper to go round.

So we might as well find the gin and begin. "The vicar's cat is an aberrant cat..." Everything from the Queen's speech to the salmonella in the turkey is combining to make us comatose over Christmas. Something to wake us up is no bad thing. Let's play up and play their blessed games for one day in 365. After all, if you had that much to talk about, you'd see each other more often, wouldn't you?

Some advice from an old party book: "Let some of the games be noisy ones, some of them atrociously silly, and it will be just as well if you get to know a few that are sedate."

ATROCIOUSLY SILLY GAMES

Here are some games that would not come amiss at a *Fewell Towers* party.

■ **Flour Game.** Tightly pack flour in a bowl and turn out on to a plate, placing a chocolate on top. Players take it in turns to slice a piece of the flour mountain away without letting it collapse. The loser gets their face pushed into the flour — and the chocolate by way of compensation.

■ **The Vicar's Cat.** A round-the-room game. Everyone has to find an adjective to fit the feline. You start with "a" ("The vicar's cat is an artful cat... angry cat... absent-minded cat" and so on), proceeding through the alphabet to "z". It's obviously more difficult if you're the last to go, so the starting point moves on a person with each letter. If you can't think of a new word you're out.

■ **Up-Jenkins.** A find-the-coin game for two teams facing each other across a table. A coin is passed about by one

team under the table and is finally concealed in one player's hand. The other team gives orders, trying to hear or see the coin. "Up-Jenkins" means the coin team must raise their hands at 90 degrees to the table with fingertips resting on it. "Smash" means bring your palms down with a bang. Hands are eliminated until the opposing team chooses one and all the players see whether it's the right one.

Here is another silly game, adapted from my ancient book, *Games for your Party*, by Bernard Stanley.

■ **In Who Are You?** The organiser pins a well-known name on the back of each guest. You then move around the room asking questions of each other to find out who you are. Nothing too direct. Not "Am I the Duchess of York?" but "Do I bank with *Helal* magazine?" After a while the organiser calls each name and you find out if whether you have guessed right. As Mr Stanley says: "You must exercise discretion in the names you foist on your friends or your friends may become your foes."

■ **Needles is a sedate but funny game**

involving male and female pairs. Needles, thread, buttons and small pieces of fabric are laid out on a table at the end of the room. The women have to run and get the items; the men have to thread the needle and sew on the button; the women have to run back with the sewing. First button on wins.

SEDATE GAMES

Most board games are for small numbers of players. Here are a few for a reasonable-sized party, which already has Monopoly and Trivial Pursuit.

■ **The Manager** claims to be the first ever fantasy football board game for up to six players, who are cast as managers of Premiership football clubs. They play with Banco de Venables currency (Tel himself created the game), buying and selling players. The winner is the one with the most cash at the end (£19.99, Waddingtons).

■ **Hazard** features Chaucer's pilgrims and the idea is to be the first to get around the board from medieval Southwark to Canterbury. Up to six can play and you learn about the

Canterbury Tales as you go. Minimum age seven (£15.95, Past Times).

NOISY GAMES

■ **Poison Spot.** You need space and not much furniture. Everyone stands in a ring hand in hand, music is turned on and the ring careers around. Two handkerchiefs are spread on the floor and anyone touching one is out. You're allowed to nudge other people on to the poison spots. As numbers thin out, more spots are added. In the case of aggressive play, stop the music and everyone must stand still.

BOOKS

■ If you want something more modern, Waterstones suggests: *A Book of Surrealist Games* by Alastair Brotchie (Sharnbala, £7.99) for language and alternative card games; *The Penguin Book of Games* by Sarah Toynbee (£4.99), with more than 100 games for grown-ups; *The Big Family Games Book* by Jane Moliniaux (Michael O'Mara, £12.99), six family games and pieces; *The Mammoth Book of Word Games* by Peter Newby (Robinson Publishing, £5.99), games from cipher text to word squares. J.P.

Ruth Gledhill on a celebrity Christmas carol service that had a serious message behind the fun and laughter

Why Wally made it the best Christmas ever



SURPRISING numbers of young people among the elderly and blind, some with Harrods shopping bags and others with friendly guide dogs, squeezed between the pews or, in the case of one particularly large, hairy alsatian, flowed over into the aisle, for our celebrity Christmas carol service in the heart of the City of London. An enormous, sparkling Christmas tree dominated the front of the church, and it began to feel as though Christmas had truly begun as the choir processed up the aisle, robed choirgirls patting the eager alsatian as they clambered over it to reach their seats on the stage, singing throughout.

The Anglican clergyman taking the service, Dr Michael Peel, opened with a bidding prayer: "My friends, as we prepare ourselves to hear the message of angels, so let us go in heart and mind to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass and the babe lying in a manger."

We were in the City Temple, the only continuing Free Church within the City, and with a history dating to the 1600s. Its ministers have included Thomas Goodwin, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, and besides its regular congregation, it is home to the Christian Life Bible College.

For our carol service, various stars of radio, television and the



Jenny Seagrove, Clive Anderson and Honor Blackman read prayers

stage had volunteered to do the readings to benefit the charities Help the Aged and Action for Blind People. Our first reading was by Clive Anderson, the chat-show host, a man blessed with the rare power to generate laughter, no matter what he says. I only just controlled the urge to giggle uncontrollably as he launched into two rather serious verses from Isaiah.

The next reading, by the actress Jenny Seagrove, calmed us down and Honor Blackman personified the spirit of Christmas past as she read from Norman Longmate's *How We Lived Then*, with his tale of the Sheffield girl in the Second World War, who wrote to Santa Claus for "any little thing you can spare", or the Surrey girl who left instructions for Santa Claus on the

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MINISTER: The Rev Dr David Hilborn

ARCHITECTURE: Although built in 1858 after its predecessor on the site was bombed in 1941, this church feels much older. Its vast and stunning interior gives a Godly impression of austere magnificence. ★★★★★

MUSIC: Admirable descants from London University's church choir, who sang popular carols in between most of the readings. ★★★★★

LITURGY: Time-honoured Christmas format of nine lessons and carols. ★★★★★

SPIRITUAL HIGH: Joyful and triumphant. ★★★★★

AFTER-SERVICE CARE: Sandwiches, quiches and hot mince pies, washed down with alcohol-free mulled fruit juice. ★★★★★

living room table, directing him to the bomb shelter in the cellar where she was sleeping on Christmas Eve. After that, Frank Windsor of *2-Cars* fame shot straight from the hip with Matthew chapter one, his voice resounding through the temple. All the readings were followed by music or a carol and our treat this time was *O Little Town of Bethlehem* by the blind guitarist David James. Nerys

Hughes talked us gently through Luke chapter two, and then it was back to Mr Anderson for *Dina Donahue's Trouble at the Inn*, a story which, fortunately, was this time meant to be funny.

Anderson described a nativity play, where the part of the innkeeper was played by a man called Wally, who would today be classed as suffering from a "learning disability". When the time came to turn Mary and Joseph away, he could not remember his lines. The prompter urged him to turn the Holy family away but he just stood there, his mouth open, eyes filling with tears, staring at Mary. Finally, he cried out: "Don't go, Joseph. Bring Mary back. You can have my room." As Mr Anderson explained, some people in the town thought the play had been ruined. Others, however, considered Wally had made it the best Christmas the town had ever seen.

Dr Peel went on to lead us in prayer: "May the humility of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the joy of the angels and the peace of the Christ-child be God's gift to you this Christmas time." He blessed us all before sending us into a night where the shops had finally closed and the true spirit of Christmas began to be felt in the present.

● City Temple, Holborn Viaduct, London EC1A 2DE.

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FEATHER REPORT



Sapphire Hoe is one Euro-tunnel asset that must bring undiluted joy to the company's accountants. Ecologically, it is all profit: about 6.5 million cubic yards of chalk marl, the spoil from the English half of the Channel Tunnel excavations, sown with wild-flower seeds.

Planting on the 135-acre site at Dover includes rock samphire seeded from descendants of the plants growing on adjacent cliffs which a botanically correct Shakespeare includes in *Lear*:

Act IV, Scene VI. Stage directions:
The country near Dover.

Edgar (to Gloucester):
The crows and coughts that wing
the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles:
half way down
Hangs one that gathers
sapphire...

The chalk spoil has been contoured to mimic the form of nearby Folkestone Warren. Although it has not seen the sun for millions of years, naturalists expect this most virginal of seed bases in time to support many of the traditional plant species of chalk downland, the dominant habitat here.

Botanists are delighted with last summer's yield. The hoe already supports bird's-foot trefoil, pink sainfoin and yellow kidney vetch, some of the distinct flora in landscape form virtually wiped off the face of Britain by postwar agricultural changes. More than 70 per cent of chalk down-

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land has been lost to agriculture in the past 50 years, and much of the rest is under threat through lack of attention.

Sampshire Hoe is the boldest of the attempts at habitat creation by the White Cliffs Countryside Project, a joint initiative to improve one of the most conspicuous, and most transited, landscapes in Britain. (It includes the White Cliffs of Dover and, increasingly many people's first and last view of England. Cherry Garden Hill, that sweep of cattle-dotted scarp above the entrance to the tunnel.)

The White Cliffs Countryside Project, launched in 1989 in the early days of the Channel Tunnel construction, is one of the most potent environmental alliances of its type in Britain. Funding partners include Eurotunnel, which owns large areas around the tunnel mouth, Railtrack, the Countryside Commission, Kent, Shepway and Dover councils, the Kent Wildlife Trust and landowners.

The project manages three large areas of chalk downland: the Western Heights above the White Cliffs of

Dover, Folkestone Warren, and Folkestone Downs, which runs serenely above the bewildering matrix of railway lines, roads, overbridges and gantries of the tunnel terminal.

The scheme has already scored some notable successes in restoring areas of downland which had become overgrown, but at least were never ploughed, seeded or treated with chemicals and fertiliser and turned over to intensive agriculture.

"Because of the lack of traditional management, much of this land was derelict, rank and coarse, invaded with scrub," says the project officer, Nick Johannsen. "There were problems of fly-tipping and litter. Without intervention, a huge area of species-rich grassland would have been lost."

In all, project workers have cleared about 700 acres of ancient chalk grassland of scrub. The chief agent of repair is cattle. "We have been grazing some downs for seven years and have seen spectacular improvement," Mr Johannsen says. Downs which were knee-high in coarse grass have been transformed to a fine turf.

with many dormant species growing again, such as cowslips, harebells and orchids, in turn supporting up to 30 species of butterfly.

The land is being grazed by animals belonging to farmers who receive payments to underwrite what would otherwise be loss-making farming activities under the Government's Countryside Stewardship scheme. (A condition of the scheme is public access to the downs and, reflecting the project's Cross-Channel links, signs and leaflets are bilingual.)

An indicator of success is the Adonis Blue butterfly, which needs closely grazed turf. It has staged a sensational comeback. Once it was common on the downs — there are records of Victorian lepidopterists brushing up clouds of the butterflies on the tops. "Ten years ago, they were here in dozens; now it's up to hundreds. I look forward to thousands," Mr Johannsen says.

As well as creating new and rescuing old downland, the project is

recreating the habitat on about 43 acres of land which has been turned over to arable farming. Round Hill, part of Eurotunnel's large estate just above the first section of the tunnel, has been weaned off its agri-chemical addiction and sown with kidney vetch, upright broom and oxeye daisy.

Initial results are encouraging, though Mr. Johannsen says that the restoration process will be slow on such sites. "Plants are spreading in from adjoining downland, but there may still only be 20 to 30 species, compared to several hundred on the down that was never ploughed. The process is not fully understood. We are still learning, and however much money we spend, we cannot recreate the intricacy of the flora on the ancient downs."

GARETH HUW DAVIES

- *Samphire Hoe is not yet open to the public, though guided walks have been arranged. The next is on Dec 29, 2pm.*
- *White Cliffs Countryside Project, 6 Cambridge Terrace, Dover, Kent CT16 1T (01304 241806).*

THE "true-love's" present for the first day of Christmas in the song is the rarest of all his or her 12 gifts. Drummers drum, geese lay and lords leap — but partridges never settle in pear trees. In fact, they hardly ever perch in trees at all. They may, occasionally land on a fence, but essentially they are ground birds.

erable to predators, such as foxes, when there is no corn to hide in, so they squat down at dusk in a circle — perhaps 12 or 15 birds — all facing outwards. That way they have a better chance of detecting an enemy approaching.

Not many people have seen these night circles, but sometimes one can find a ring of their droppings showing where they have been.

On windy nights they are less likely to roost in this way, because they prefer to face into a strong wind, like most roosting birds. That keeps their feathers unruffled — and it is their feathers that keep them warm.

PARTRIDGES start pairing in late January or February. It is a fine public spectacle. You hear their metallic calls and find 20 or 30 of them out together in an open field — probably two or three coveys joining up. They run about in front of each other, chase and fight, and take little notice of a discreet observer.

Then they start leaving the field in couples. Love and spring are on their way.

DERWENT MAY

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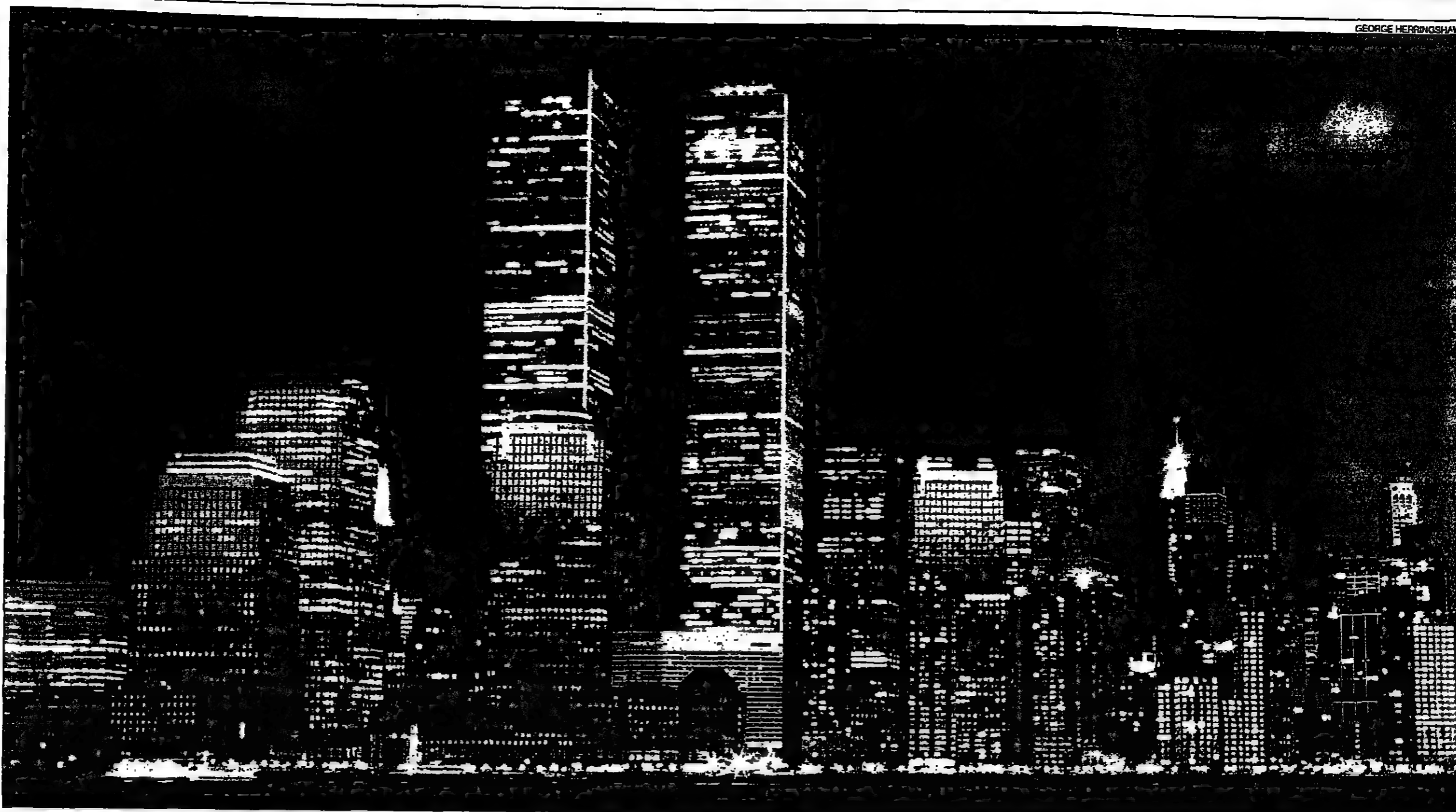




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Lower Manhattan at sunset, probably the most famous skyline in the world and the last glimpse of New York for passengers sailing across the Atlantic on the QE2. Cunard has kept its glamorous image anchored firmly in the 1930s.

A dance with Dad to the music of time

While the Manhattan skyline shrank into the pale September sky, Dad was playing golf. I watched his club arcing through the green cage beyond the lifeboats. Twenty-five years ago I worked as his caddy for half-a-crown (12p).

I had brought my father with me on a short assignment — two days in New York then back on the QE2. It was a treat I wanted to give him; he deserved it, and as a self-employed building contractor he could easily have time off. "Why do you want to take me?" he had blurted out in delight when I surprised him with the tickets.

It was the first time we had spent more than two days together since I

was a teenager, and the first time we had been alone for a week in our lives. "Alone?" We were joined on the QE2 by 1,000 crew members and 800 other passengers. In every corner of the ship a lurking Cunard employee inquired after our health, offered us food or took our photograph in soft focus — sometimes all three at once.

The inconvenient absence of scenery is an occupational hazard of cruising across the Atlantic. To make up for it, Cunard goes overboard, so to speak, on the entertainment: lectures, quiz shows, bingo, films, shops, table-tennis championships, church and synagogue services, talent shows, aerobics classes, scrabble contests and meetings of the Masonic

Two views of the First Lady of the sea — a daughter treating her foxtrotting father to a trip, and a wide-eyed first-timer

brethren. It even has the nerve to include a weight-control seminar. Dressing up, sipping cocktails and whirling round the dance floor are *de rigueur* and "gentlemen hosts" are employed to foxtrot with single women passengers.

In the face of change throughout the leisure sector, Cunard has kept its Noel Coward-and-Royalty image anchored in the 1930s. "It's like arriving in little old England as soon as you step off the pier in New York," a retired attorney from Kansas told me as I trod on his foot during a tango lesson.

Dad and I shared a cabin. It was very comfortable, though it did remind me why I had left home. In 1842 Dickens and his wife shared a cabin during a transatlantic crossing on Cunard's *Britannia*, and he wrote in his diary: "It is as close to hell as I can imagine." It took 14 days then, and milk was provided by a cow on deck. She was stowed in a hammock as it was the only way they could keep her upright.

What I liked best on the QE2 was lying on the sundeck and letting the steward wrap me in a navy serge blanket like a horse. Like all his

colleagues, this youth wore a badge bearing his name. And like us, David came from Bristol. The sundeck under his aegis had the whiff of a resort out of season, lumpy shapes covered in green tarpaulins stowed along the edges of the smooth grey boards.

Most of the time Dad lay next to me on the sundeck and David ministered to us with tea and crustless ham sandwiches. Many hours unravelled as Dad and David discussed Bristol City FC, the pair of them expressing such vehement rebuttals of the manag-

er's selection that I wondered why they did not ring him up on the satellite phone to tell him where he was going wrong.

Bad weather eventually drove us off the sundeck. On the third evening — half-way — crepes suzettes had to be removed from the dinner menu. "Too much swell for a naked flame," our waiter said.

Stormy seas, coupled with the irritating absence of scenery, meant we were ineluctably drawn to the on-board human landscape. Most of the other passengers were American, their faces mulberried by drink and their minds blanched by the eternal peace of Kansas. They smiled at us benignly, the happy image of parent and child.

There were things I had planned

to say to Dad in the leisurely moments of our cruise but, of course, I did not.

I am glad we shared the experience. People usually write things about their fathers after they have lost them, and the literature recites a litany of regret — for things unsaid, debts unpaid, love constrained. There is never enough time in the endless cycle of parenthood.

Watching Dad capering around the dance floor of the QE2 as if he were a teenager, I wondered if this was the first stage in the inevitable reversal of roles as children become parents and parents come to depend on them.

SARA WHEELER

• The author was a guest of Cunard.

Caviar or turtle soup? I think I'll have both

The QE2's maiden voyage in 1967 was described by some British commentators as even more exciting than the Apollo space rocket lift-off. Standing on the bridge hundreds of miles from land, surrounded by the unforgiving Atlantic, I could understand the exaggeration.

Despite running aground in 1995, and much publicised problems with exploding lavatories on the 1994 world cruise, the ageing First Lady of the sea retains a unique aura of glamour.

The elegant liner makes the slow trip from Southampton to New York up to 24 times a year. It may take five days as opposed to a mere eight hours in a jet. But no view from an aeroplane, 35,000ft above the waves, matches the magic of that first glimpse of the approaching Manhattan skyline from the cabin porthole.

Hundreds of passengers rushed on deck at dawn to watch the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, the Staten Island ferry and the United Nations building slip past in slow motion.

Down below, hundreds more passengers were fast asleep in their cabins. Presumably they were the ones who have made the trip two or three times a year for the past 20 years. The ship is addictive.

When I walked up the gangway in Southampton five days earlier I had felt like the 14-year-old boy in 1975 who boarded a plane for the first time with his parents when Spanish package holidays were a new phenomenon.

However, my excitement was nothing compared with

the breathless reaction of the American holidaymakers in their vast floral shirts, jostling to be first on board and posing for photographs with anyone who was wearing a uniform.

I fought, with limited success, with the floral shirts, weighed down by cine equipment which would have put a BBC outside broadcast crew to shame, for a bird's-eye view on deck to watch land disappear.

A flotilla of small boats escorted us out to sea, their whistles blasting; proud to be in the same wake as Cunard's finest.

Stepping inside was like going back to an era long before package holidays and supersonic flights. The decor is more Dickens than Conan. Thick velvet drapes, deep carpets, and dozens of rarely seen portraits of a young Queen Elizabeth. Few pictures remain of her daughters-in-law.

Cunard has attracted a more diverse age group on board. Shampoo and sets are no longer the most sought-after service in the hairdressing salon. The average age of a passenger is below 58. In the ballroom, competition is still intense among wealthy widows for the favours of eligible male dancing partners.

But the golden oldies aerobics class remains one of the most popular organised activities. There were lectures, videos, an enormous library, magic shows for the children, sponge painting and a talk on Ivor Novello. Max Bygraves, 74, who topped the entertainment bill, was a big success. And yes, he sang: "You need hands."

This is a liner which exudes such confidence that the in-

house video boasts a documentary on the sinking of the *Titanic*.

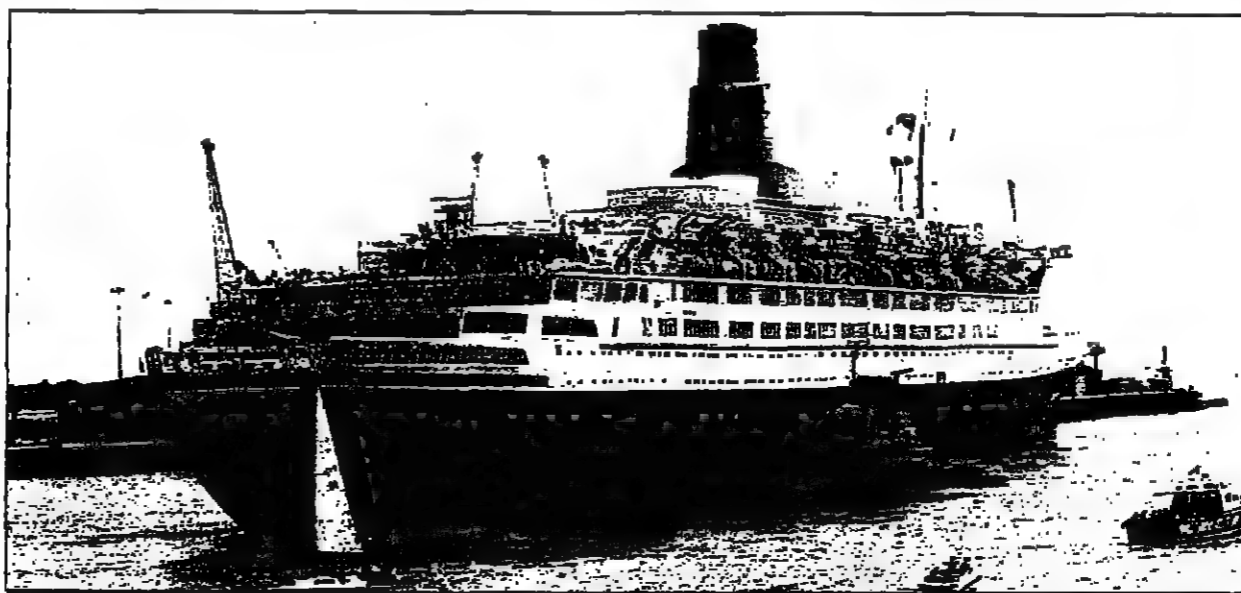
Stress is non-existent. The only ordeals, having dressed for dinner, is the exhaustive round of cocktail parties, which are a hotbed of ship gossip. Invitations are highly prized for champagne in Captain Ronald Warwick's boardroom.

The toughest choice of the week is at the dining table. Russian caviar or turtle soup as a starter? Here you can have both. There is something almost decadent about dining under huge windows overlooking the battleship-grey Atlantic, the gloom only occasionally illuminated by the far-off lights of a passing liner.

White-coated and gold-braided waiters hover discreetly around the dining table. Leather-bound menus are perched between seemingly endless rows of silver cutlery and crystal glass. In the strict caste system, the Queen's Grill is for the elite. I was in the Grill, second class by comparison, but it still felt like the Ritz.

Dining can be hazardous. One English couple protested to their *maitre d'* about the monosyllabic German couple sitting opposite at breakfast. They were too late. The Germans had launched a pre-emptive strike, complained and changed their table first.

Meals run endlessly into each other with afternoon tea and cakes served each day. Cucumber and salmon sandwiches were popular with the Americans. After two cocktail parties and a sumptuous ban-



Despite problems at the start of her 1994 world cruise, the ageing QE2 retains an aura of glamour and grandeur

quet, a floor show and a brief but unprofitable spell in the casino, it is to the Chart Room for a nightcap. Or maybe to the Yacht Club, which appears to go on all night. Some people are having a midnight swim. Others are ambling on deck.

Exercise can consist of a daily trip around the shopping mall, by taking the plunge in one of three swimming pools, or by jogging round the deck. The latter has to be negotiated with care. The ship is 13 decks high and about 320 yards long.

The Atlantic passed by in a blur of black tie and cocktail dresses, and impeccable service with 33lb of caviar, a thousand bottles of champagne and 500lb of strawberries all disappearing on the voyage.

The first glimpse of New York might have been exciting. But the most memorable part of the trip was now over.

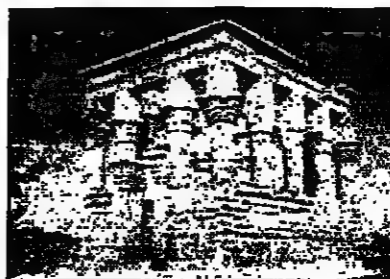
ANDREW PIERCE
• The author travelled courtesy of Cunard.

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Golden road to Samarkand

The hotel manager smiled pruriently, wagged her finger and declared: "You are not married." We were in her Office for the Foreigners, a bizarre blend of Soviet roccoco, and having been caught trying to check in now faced this moment of truth. "You need my permission," she spoke with relish. Passports were pawed, visas studied and the how long, what, when and where of our stay mulled over until, finally, an obliging welcoming smile.

Such are the baffling ways of Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan. To visit this country is to peel back the layers of an onion of perplexing shape and pungency. Nominally Islamic, steadfastly communist in all but name, it knows with pride it is the soul of Central Asia and is slowly trying to forge a new identity. Meanwhile, dollars will do nicely.

And hence the debate over matrimony. The moral high ground of two singles earns more than one double and it's not only tourist apparatchiks who are in the know. Just

**Uzbekistan,
the soul of
central Asia,
will startle
the unwary**

outside the foyer and at almost all hours of the day, a posse of older people were touting cut-price rooms in their homes. This nascent capitalism is just one strand in the unravelling of Central Asia.

In town, workers at the Kukeldash Madrasa, the Islamic school, welcomed us in a courtyard lined with small rooms. Sprawled on diwans behind the main portico, they poured us green tea and we regarded one another with shameless curiosity. Tourists being thin on the ground, they wanted news and views.

A youth translated. What did I think of Mike Tyson? News of the great one's conversion to Islam had penetrated even here. Only last

prevented an honest answer. "We are not Iran," said one man later, others nodding in agreement. "and we don't want to be like them."

Tashkent is full of surprises. There are Snickers, Mars Bars and Uzbek champagne at £2 a bottle. Prostitutes are so sleek and discreet it would be harsh to call them whores. There are trams and a metro with themed, stylised stations; the roads are smooth, wide and shady with trees. It is the oddest bit of west in the east. "Native drums", heard by master-spy Sir Fitzroy Maclean in the 1930s, which "throbbed rhythmically in the warm Eastern-smelling darkness", are elusive.

But there is opera — at the Alisher Navoi Opera and Ballet Theatre, a neo-classical Stalinist mishmash. At 50p a ticket, it hosts the cheapest opera anywhere yet audiences are pitiful, as much an indication of changing mores as the number of Russians returning to the motherland.

We headed west on the Golden Road to Samarkand. Its monuments to empire

building and vanity have left many a writer struggling to evoke the dazzling patterns of blue, green, yellow and turquoise glaze shimmering on domes, minarets and arched façades. Registan Square is

the country's Taj Mahal, a spectacular ensemble of minarets from the early 1400s to the mid-17th century and on a drop-jaw scale. There is mosaic everywhere, endless motifs that even break Islam's prohibi-

tion on depicting living things. So far it has survived conflict, neglect, scavengers and earthquakes. Rather than endure communism, it was tended and restored. But the rigours of independence may

prove to be another acid test. The Registan is but a postscript to the reign of mighty Tamerlane who almost conquered half the world and held most of it in fear. He made Samarkand his capital and his tomb, retrieved from the clutches of collapse, stands in a revitalised compound. Beneath its ribbed dome lie six cenotaphs, a cracked green one to the man himself.

For another small "fee", a nervous guard took us down to the crypt to steal a glimpse at the real thing by the dim glow of bulbs. Not bad for the killer of 17 million people.

The real centre of infamy, though, on a smaller more lucid scale was Bukhara. Once called "the Noble", described as "one of the dirtiest and most unhealthy places in Asia". At our Bukhara hotel, the receptionist saw I was British, smiled and drawing his finger under his neck said something like "Stot" and "Coley" — a reference, to Stoddart and Conolly, the 19th century British Army officers.

At the height of the "Great Game" when Britain and Russia were jostling for power, influence and ultimately the security of India, Stoddart had come as political agent. Faced with a tyrannical Emir and ill-versed in the opaqueness of Central Asian etiquette and diplomacy, he managed to offend rather than befriend. Conolly the rescuer was wrongfooted too, and after months in jail the pair were executed in the square before the citadel.

We sat in the square and munched through shashlyk, grilled skewered mutton, and fresh lepeschia, a flat unleavened bread washed down with steaming tea. Traffic was slight and we wondered where everyone was. This odd emptiness, akin to an old Avengers episode, seemed with few exceptions endemic to Bukhara.

Walking to the city's historic core, it was hard to credit an old proverb "as wide awake as a broker of Bukhara". Hundreds of years ago it was a wealthy, thriving caravan town bridging China and west Asia. Now I saw a struggling market where from tables people peddled Turkish chocolates, detergents and vodka, the goods of the moment.

If Bukhara was a byword for the nobility of Islam, then remote Khiva was that of duplicity and treachery. The West's first serious approach was dispatched by Peter the Great in 1717. His envoy and 4,000 men were warmly welcomed, split up supposedly for

comfort, and then murdered. It was another 156 years before the last khanate succumbed to the grip of Russia.

From Bukhara it's an eight-hour bus trip through the Kizyl-Kum desert. Towns cursed with spidery gantries and cranes loomed out of the dusk and disappeared into darkness; the lands which government forgot. Under a brilliant moon we crossed the sheeny River Oxus, that most unknown of rivers.

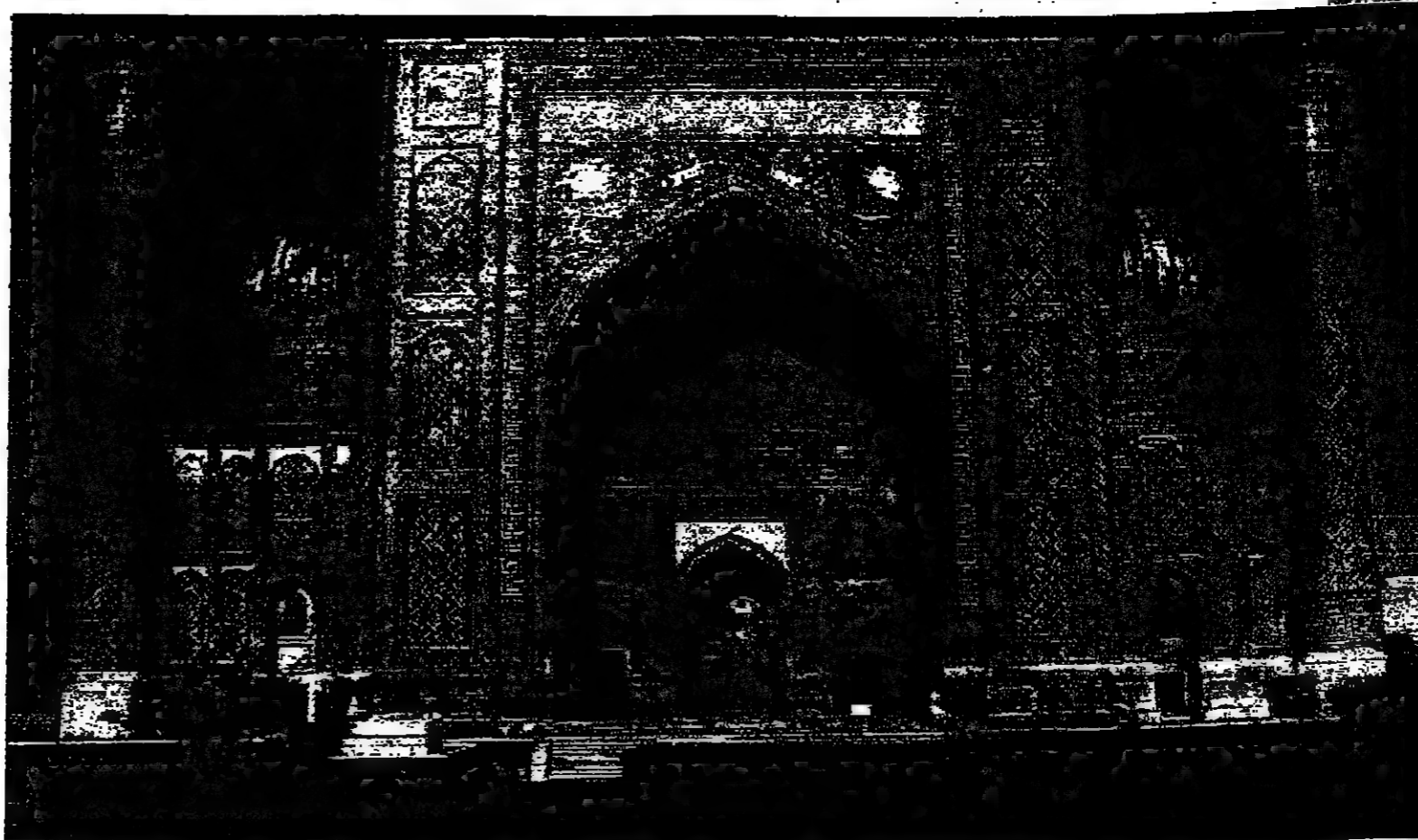
As we arrived, taxis swarmed around and a friendly mob hemmed us in. Olya, a dark, handsome woman wondered if we might like to share hers. Once in we succumbed to the arms of hospitality as she brought us home to sister Sonya; grand, old and turbaned. With hears of gold they fed us for two days with all the food Uzbek restaurants have never known. Resting on a carpeted diwan in their trellised courtyard, we watched Sonya knock back a vodka and listened to Olya explain her rag trade business trips to Delhi.

Khiva is something of a museum, the most intact of any Silk Route oasis city, still surrounded by high clay walls and gates, packed with mausolees, minarets and one glorious palace. We entered through the west gate and a man I took to be a guide approached. Sensing my levity, he announced he was KGB and wanted to see our "papers". Such an old-fashioned word, I thought, redolent of Buchan and espionage and quite enough to ensure our undivided attention.

Leaving behind gaggles of local tourists and a motley crew of hawkers, we wandered through the near-deserted historic heart of Khiva. Each corner of its narrow streets evokes forgotten lives, hopes and miseries. Little of it is more than 200 years old but all reeks of antiquity.

At the Tash Khauli Palace we saw the most vintage morsel of Central Asian mien. At a mausoleum dedicated to a 14th century poet, wrestler and doctor, a veiled woman was paying her respects. The veil was unusual enough. But in leaving she retreated facing the tomb and murmuring prayers. Other women looked on in amazement and even embarrassment. Uzbekistan the onion had been peeled, cut and quartered. I was enthralled but only a little wiser.

AMAR GROVER



Registan Square in Samarkand is Uzbekistan's Taj Mahal, a spectacular ensemble of minarets from the early 1400s to the mid-17th century



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UZBEKISTAN FACT FILE

■ Steppes East (01285 810267) offers a ten-day Treasures of Uzbekistan tour from £1,415; Exodus (0181-675 5550) has a 15-day Samarkand and the Silk Road tour at £1,395; and Regent Holidays (0117-921 1711) can arrange personalised itineraries from about £1,200 for two weeks. All tours include return flights from London.

■ Group tourists with pre-booked accommodation are preferred. Independent travel is possible but getting a visa may be awkward. The Embassy of Uzbekistan (0171-229 7679) is at 421 Holland Park, London W11 2RP. The Uzbekistan Tourist Office (0171-935 1899) at 13 Marylebone Lane, London W1M 5FE can also arrange visits.

■ Flights start at £525 return with Turkish Airlines (Condor Travel, 0171-373 8477). Uzbekistan Airways (61-72 Wigmore St, London W1, 0171-935 4775) has direct flights to Tashkent from £575. Fares may increase from March 25 next year.

■ Travel within the country is economical and reasonably efficient. Hotels usually charge westerners at least triple the local room rate and many could do with refurbishment.

■ Reading: The Travel Bookshop (0171-229 5260) recommends *Traveller's Companion to Central Asia* by Kathleen Hopkirk (John Murray, £12.99, ISBN 0 71955 321 0). *Goodnight, Mr Lenin* by Tiziano Terzani (Picador, £5.99, ISBN 0 33032 962 0).

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SE Asia: Graham Lord is pampered from head to toe at the Oriental Hotel and takes a luxury route to the high life

Live like a king but still be walked over

For 15 years the surprisingly English 120-year-old Oriental Hotel in Bangkok has been voted the best hotel in the world. The rich and famous will stay nowhere else and the hotel has won so many trophies and awards that it has a spotlight alcove for them near its glittering arcade of exclusive shops.

But how can any one hotel be the best in the world? I arrived determined to be sceptical, to find fault wherever I could, but you cannot fail to be charmed from the moment you arrive. They could be right. This is the best hotel in the world. By the fountains in the lobby a pretty, pink-uniformed Thai girl welcomed me in from the sweltering heat of Bangkok with a fragrant jasmine garland, a traditional Thai salute and a glorious smile. A messenger delivered me to the reception desk. A receptionist took me without any delay to my third-floor suite. She even filled in my arrival card for me.

The split-level suite was spacious and airy, with silent air-conditioning, a crystal chandelier, fresh flowers and stunning views across the busy Chao Phraya river with its palms, ferns, sampans, ferries and river buses. There were fresh flowers even in the bathroom, along with a huge array of every toiletry you could possibly need.

The butler arrived in 45 seconds with a glass of chilled orange juice decorated with three purple orchids and asked if there was anything I needed. More orchid petals floated in the fingerbowl beside the plate of fruit and decorated the soap dishes in the bathroom.

And so it went on: they seem to have thought of everything, from the eight superb restaurants and the Thai cooking school to the gym, the spa, the business centre, the culture programme, the hotel's own river cruiser.

In my living room there was a hardback history of the hotel, a new magazine, a rack of postcards, a golden letter opener, a printed card saying in Thai "please drive me to the Oriental", and six sheets of gold-embossed hotel writing paper with my name in gold.

In the bedroom cupboard there was a torch, clothes brush, umbrella, four sizes of slipper and a long-handled shoe-horn for the fatter customer. In the minibar there was iced water and decent-sized bottles of spirits rather than miniatures. And the in-house TV movie channel was offering 28 films, from *Carry on Cleo* to *Murder on the Orient Express*. Even the electricity power-points take British plugs.

After a lunch of curried duck and plums I returned to my room to find a red rose and a bottle of Taittinger champagne in an ice bucket, with a handwritten welcome from the hotel's German Buddhist manager, 58-year-old Kurt Wachter. Later, I crossed

FACT FILE

■ Under the Winter Interlude programme (until Mar 31, 1997) rooms at the Oriental start at £190 a night for one or two people. The price includes breakfast, fruit and flowers on arrival, a complimentary bed for a child under 12 sharing the room with parents, use of the hotel's fitness facilities, and late check-out up to 6pm. For reservations call 0800 962667.

■ Any passenger arriving from or travelling to Singapore on the Eastern & Oriental Express train (from £290 per person) may also be entitled to one free night at the Oriental and one night at the Oriental Hotel in Singapore (reservations on 0171-805 5100).

■ AsiaWorld Travel (01932 820050) offers six nights at the Oriental, including return flights and transfers (room only), from £1,072 per person.

the river in the hotel ferry to enjoy a traditional one-hour Thai massage for £29 in a large private room in the Oriental's Spa Centre set in a lush, tranquil little garden and smelling deliciously of warm herbs. The young masseuse was so skilful that I fell asleep as she crawled up and down my spine on her knees. Afterwards I felt about 20 years old.

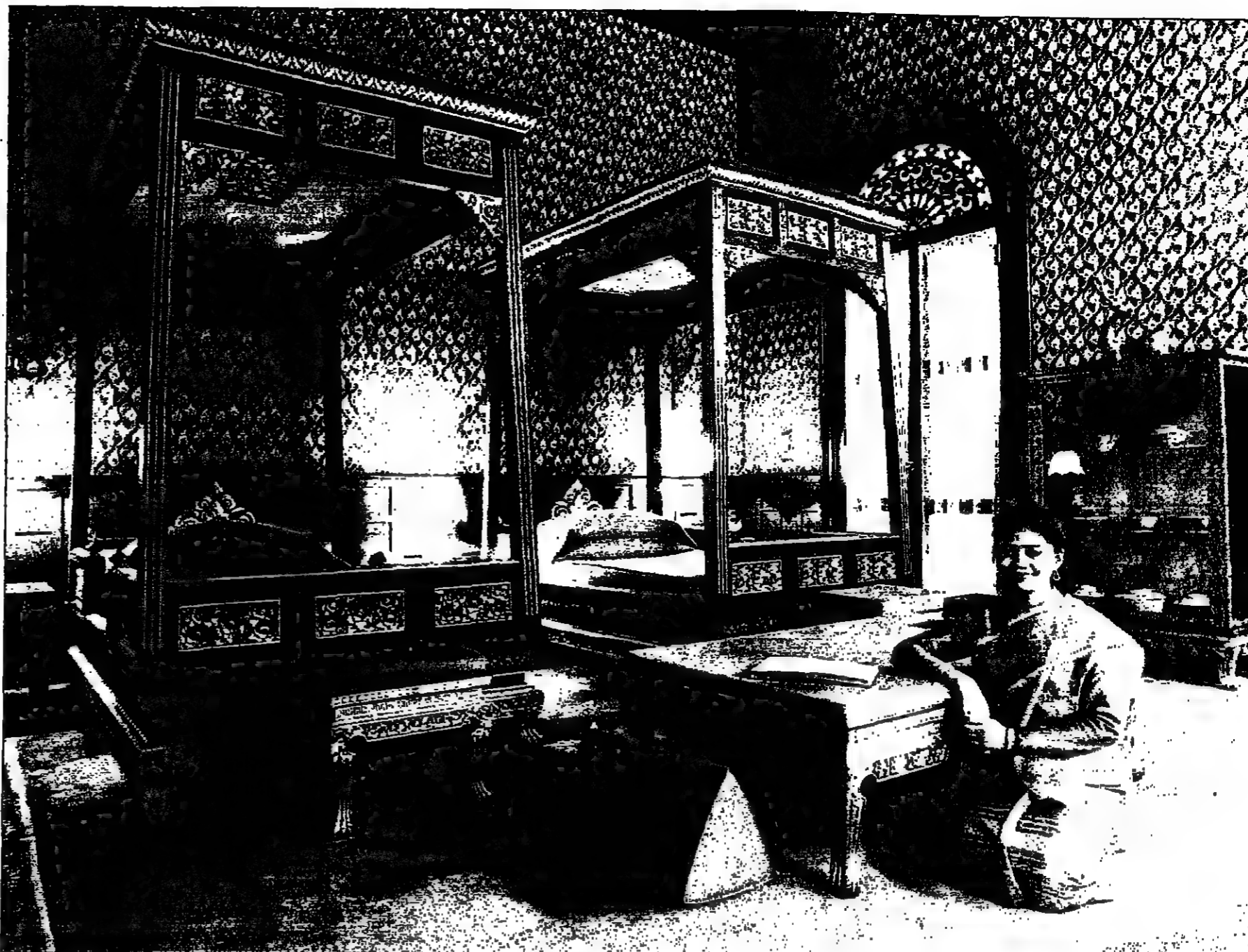
The 49 afternoon tea in the airy, ferny Authors' Lounge — with muffins, scones, Devonshire cream, fruit cake and black-tie musicians playing the flute and guitar — could have been served at the London Ritz, and during early evening sundowners in the vast, elegant lobby the Oriental string quartet was playing *Greenleeves*. When I returned to my room there was a plate of savoury spring rolls — garnished with a purple orchid, to go with the champagne.

Dinner that night — Japanese *sushi* in the Lord Jim restaurant as the pianist played *As Time Goes By* — was beautifully presented and delicious, even the studded octopus tentacles, even though I had never tried raw fish before.

Afterwards the cool, flower-decked riverside terrace was a joy after the heat of the day, and Henrietta Robinson, the American jazz singer who kept us up until 1am in the Bamboo Bar, was magnificent.

When I finally crawled into bed I found, carefully laid out beside the bed, a linen napkin and hotel slippers. It was 1.30am and I did not know how to switch off the light in the cupboard, but when I rang reception a smiling member of staff arrived in moments.

In fact, every member of staff was always gracious and smiling. Even a cleaning woman in an



The Somerset Maugham suite at the Oriental hotel has twin four-posters. Among the other suites named after authors is a pink one in honour of Barbara Cartland

afternoon corridor said she hoped I was having a nice day. And everywhere so many waiters were standing around that I know at last why they are called waiters.

Not everything would be to everyone's taste. I could have done without the nightly leaf-wrapped flower left on my pillow with quotations like this: "Golden slumbers kiss your eyes, smiles awake you when you rise."

I could also have done without the discovery that the Reading Room is named after Jeffrey Archer and that among all the plush four-poster, £522-a-night suites named after writers who have stayed in the hotel — Conrad, Maugham, Coward, Greene, Wilbur Smith — there

is one in pink called the Barbara Cartland Suite.

Two Australian women guests also complained to me that they were unable to get an iron and board to press their clothes, which they preferred to do themselves. When I asked the manager about it he said: "If you have to think about spending three dollars to have a blouse pressed, you shouldn't be staying at the Oriental."

The only big flaw I could find in the hotel was my cramped 51-square bathroom. I could not stretch my legs in the bath, let alone lie down, and the shower head was so low that I had to bend down to wash my hair. The shower tended to turn suddenly hot or cold and the

curtain was so inadequate that the floor was flooded each time. And I could hear my neighbour whenever he ran a tap or flushed the lavatory. "We are replacing all those bathrooms next year," Wachter promised. In the end, however, the pluses far outweigh the rare minuses. This hotel is all they say it is. The secret lies in the utter dedication of Mr Wachter, who has been manager for 29 years, and his 1,300 staff — and his constant Buddhist search for perfection. "I am married to a Thai," he says, "but my mistress is the hotel."

And his philosophy is devastatingly simple: *Always give the customers just a little more than they expect.* "The Oriental is the

modern answer to the 1920s Grand Hotel," says Wachter. "I can't think of any other hotel where you can do everything under one roof. Thailand is noisy, organised chaos and this beautiful, charming, romantic hotel is a real oasis. The Oriental has a soul. Thai culture lends itself to hospitality. They have a rich spirituality. They welcome you into the hotel as they would into their own house. No other hotel has that. And we are very close to the staff: two-thirds of them have been here for more than 20 years. They feel like a family. We have staff days, sports days, and send them all off now and then to a jungle monastery retreat where they sleep on the ground and eat

roots and ants. When they come back they're great friends. It's team work. We also listen carefully to our guests: if a suggestion comes up 20 times, then we do it." With its flowers, running water and music everywhere, the Oriental has the most wonderfully relaxed, old-fashioned blend of Thai and English serenity, a sense of style, elegance, fragrance and harmony with all the six senses.

And as Graham Greene wrote in a letter which is framed in the green-silk suite named after him: "It remains a hotel where almost anything may happen and one may meet almost anybody from a mere author to an international crook on his way elsewhere."

Such an engaging journey for that perfect proposal

For two years Andreas Schwengeler, a Swiss railwayman, scrimped and saved, denied himself any unnecessary expenditure and refused to buy a car. This was so that one day he could take his Spanish girlfriend Beatriz Gonzalez on the world's most romantic train journey, the three-day, two-night, 1,207-mile trip on the Eastern & Oriental Express from Singapore to Bangkok.

Mr Schwengeler was determined to propose to Miss Gonzalez, a Zurich bank clerk, in the most romantic place he could imagine. And what could be a more romantic place for a railwayman than the most exotic line in the world on a train that was inspired by the 1932 Marlene Dietrich film, *Shanghai Express*?

In June 1996 they finally made the trip and Mr Schwengeler asked Christopher Byatt, the train's English manager, where would be the best place for him to propose.

"I put champagne, two glasses and a bouquet of flowers in the library, and a garland of jasmine and roses on the Buddha. A small prayer was made to the Buddha," says Mr Byatt.

"Then I asked a steward to tell the couple that I wished to see them both in the library immediately. Schwengeler knew that was the code."

The stratagem worked. At 2.30pm — as Mr Byatt ensured the couple were not



Celebration: Beatriz Gonzalez and Andreas Schwengeler

disturbed after their lunch of curry soup, sea bream, lemon mousse and white wine in the Singapore dining car — Mr Schwengeler popped the question beneath the little Buddha statue as the train approached the border of Thailand.

And Miss Gonzalez, of course, said yes.

It is a romantic story utterly typical of the E&O Express, surely the most stylish train running anywhere in the world. "We've travelled twice on the Orient Express in Europe, too," Mr Schwengeler told me later, "but the Orient Express was never as beautiful as this."

He is right. With its art deco fittings, its Thai dancing girl, its Chinese pianist, the starlit open-air veranda observation car, the tasselled tangerine lampshades in the dining car and wood-panelled library, the E&O is as elegant as a 1930s film set. Boarding the Express just before midnight at Kuala Lumpur's old Moorish railway station, sipping champagne in the saloon car and listening to the black-tied pianist, felt like being transported back in time.

Nothing seems too much

trouble for Mr Byatt, who now lives in Bangkok, or for the other young Englishman who masterminds each journey of the E&O Express, Kevin Cape, the train's cockney executive chef. He once worked at the Connaught Hotel in London and then ran an hotel/restaurant in the Lake District, but he now lives in Singapore and for three years has been responsible for the train's superb meals.

Like Mr Byatt, Mr Cape seems unfazed by crises and challenges. "On one trip," he says, "the Thai Royal Family cancelled its booking but then at the last minute, just as we were about to leave Bangkok, one of the staff came running along the platform saying they're coming, they're coming — the Thai Royal Family. And they were. We fed them but there wasn't a lot of choice."

"We've had crises on board, as well. The freezer broke down once and I had to phone ahead to get the sorbets in dry ice. And we've had to wash the plates in Perrier because someone forgot to fill the train with tap water. But I like

crises. If you're quick with decisions you can change anything around. Just don't panic."

Cooking gourmet food aboard a train as it clackety-clacks past the palm trees, paddy fields and water buffalo of the South-East Asian jungle is very different from doing it in England.

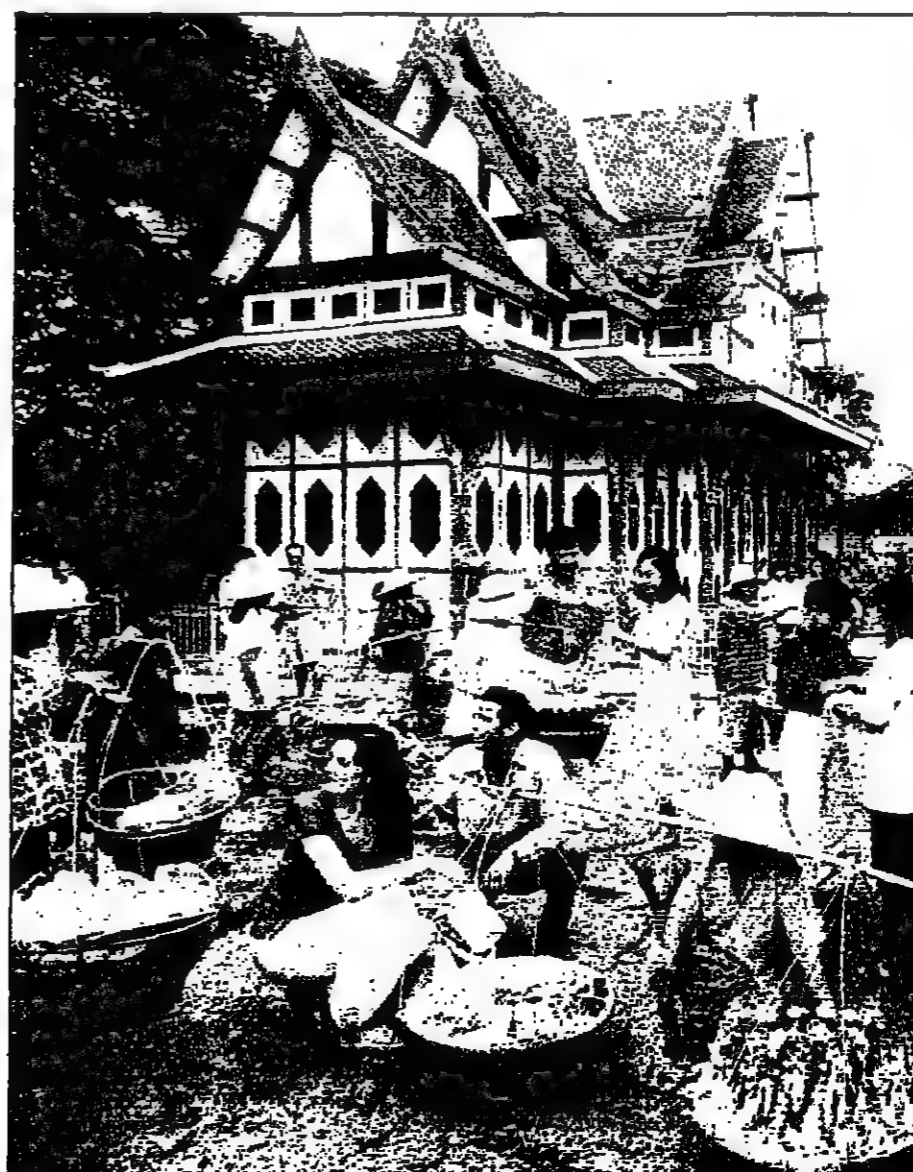
"You have to import all of it," Mr Cape says. "Cheese from France, beef from the US, salmon from Scotland. And the logistics of carrying it all on the train are difficult. I've got no ice cream on board, for instance, but if you said you wanted some for dinner tonight I could get it in about four hours."

"It's a tough life. Cooking on the train is cramped and the two kitchens are very small. Because of the restricted space you have to consider how much chopping and cutting a dish might take, and you have to contend with the movement of the train. The Malay chefs have to be taught to get a pot only half-full. You have to learn little tricks like that."

"But I love this job. The train's a beautiful product — a fantastic, classy, English product — and I have much more independence than I would have in an hotel. I could never go back to work in England. I'm too Asian now. I love Asia and the people — they're not so intense about the rat-race — and I have a Filipino girlfriend in Singapore."

"I do miss London and I used to enjoy dining out there at places like the Connaught, which is my all-time favourite. But the last time I went back I couldn't believe how miserable everyone looked. It's like everything's become totally stagnant."

Mr Cape specialises in French food with a slight Asian flavour. "We don't serve Asian food as such because of the small size of the tables, and anyway a lot of people don't understand Asian food. We try to blend them. We do sushi



Train passengers bargain with traders at a typical country station in Thailand

for our Japanese passengers and sushi with smoked fish for Westerners. Europeans like lamb but Asians don't like it slightly sour, so we poach it rather than roast it."

"I've had the most absurd questions, like 'where's the swimming pool?'," says Mr Byatt. "I wanted to say on the second floor, sir. But we can handle almost any crisis and I'm a train man at heart."

"On one journey we were running three hours late and it looked as if two couples — and their 21 pieces of Louis Vuitton luggage — were going to miss their flights from Kuala Lumpur to Sydney, California and

London, but I managed to change all the flight tickets from the train by using my mobile telephone."

However, his happiest passengers of all time have probably been Mr Schwengeler and his future bride. "When I get back to Zurich I'm going to have zero in my bank account," Mr Schwengeler said with a delighted grin, "but we'll remember this journey all our lives."

● Graham Lord was a guest of the Eastern & Oriental Express, the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok, Malaysia Airlines and the Regent Hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

WORD-WATCHING

Answers from page 19

VOLVOX
(a) A genus of fresh-water organisms having a spherical form and provided with cilia which enable them to roll over in the water. From the Latin *volvere* to roll. "In one of my specimens I found a small volvox apparently uninjured."

WENTLETRAP
(c) A marine shell of the genus *Scapharidius* or the family *Scapharididae*. An adaptation of the Dutch word for a winding stair or a spiral shell. "A Wentletrap which fetched 40 guineas in 1701 (Rumphius) was worth only 20 guineas in 1753, and now may be had for 5 shillings."

ZANDER
(b) A common European species of pike-perch, *Stizostedion lucioperca*, valued as a food fish. In modern Latin *sander*. "The German zander, pike-perch, one of the best-flavoured of the family."

VAMPLET
(c) A gaiter, usually in the plural, from *vamp* the Norman French for that part of hose or stockings which covers the foot and ankle. "Instead of white stockings, he displayed gold-buttoned vamplets of orange velvet." Who he, the old dandy? Malvolio?

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Fiji: Where champagne Crusoes find cocktail bars and four-poster beds; plus, into the hills for local liquor

The club-class castaways



Bula, bula. One hears the phrase everywhere in Fiji; it means "hello" but it conveys so much more. On Fiji lips it means, hello, welcome, cheers, hope you are enjoying your stay. Have a nice day, but with feeling.

There are more than 300 islands in Fiji but before they tell you about the climate, the water sports and the luxurious resorts, most visitors will recall the people — the friendliest on earth and for whom smiling is a way of life. Many Fijians remain untouched by "western" civilisation, never having ventured further than the next island, and all over this coral-fringed paradise the people are generous and hospitable.

Yet that is the only thing the Fijian islands have in common. Each has its own atmosphere and there is a vast range of attractions to suit every taste and almost every pocket, from hostels for Australian backpackers to exclusive private islands.

Our party visited three resorts banded together under the banner Five Star Fiji. We flew first by six-seater plane to the Wakaya Club, an hour's flight to the west of Viti Levu, the main island. The flight offered enticing views of the coral reef, lush vegetation and fine, secluded beaches before touching down on an emerald green airstrip that suddenly appeared from nowhere in the depth of the forest.

The resort owns the entire island, but accommodation is restricted to eight couples, each allocated a magnificent *bure*, a bungalow on traditional lines with a thatched roof. They are splendidly decorated with Fijian arts and crafts and come with every luxury, including a cocktail bar and four-poster bed. The sea is 50 yards away and the champagne is always on ice.

Attractions include a flatteringly easy nine-hole golf course (it meanders through a coconut grove and nuts falling from above are the main hazard), tennis and water sports of every description, from scuba-diving to windsurfing. The less energetic can simply enjoy the underwater wonderland with a trip in a glass-bottomed boat.

Picnic lunches on a private beach are a special treat. Staff drop holidaying couples at 11am with a vast ice box packed with fresh lobster and crab and bottles of Taittinger. Until the agreed afternoon pick-up total privacy is guaranteed. Hammocks hang invitingly from the trees and few can resist shedding all clothing for a romantic walk along the beach. It is like being a club-class castaway, a champagne Crusoe.

Dinner is heralded by the muffled beats of *tai* drums and is served in a huge 60ft-high pavilion built in traditional style. Four chefs provide sumptuous feasts and each night offers something special. One evening, all the food was cooked on hot coals buried in the sand; on another, supper was preceded by a magnificent display of Fijian dance and song.

Drinks are inclusive but, strangely, by 10pm the bar is deserted. Rob Miller, Wakaya's manager, said: "The *bures* are so luxurious that most couples want to go back to their rooms pretty early. We keep the bar open as long as anyone wants and we get the odd Australian who likes to sit drinking until 3am."

At Wakaya, we came across the *kava* drinking ceremony. The local chief arrived for the launch of a traditional Fijian boat which the staff had spent two years building. Before it could be rolled down the beach and into the waves, all had to sit cross-legged while bowls of *kava*, replenished from a huge



The island of Viti Levu is privately owned and accommodation is restricted to eight couples who stay in thatched bungalows, 50 yards from the sea

Fiji fact file

■ **Getting there:** Qantas (0345 747767) flies to Fiji from London via Sydney (or Los Angeles) from £1,165. The flight from Sydney to Fiji has to be booked two weeks in advance and not more than ten weeks can be spent in Fiji. Resorts arrange onward travel. Visas are not required.

■ **When to go:** the rainy season is between November and April. The climate is tropical and rain is possible outside these times. Average maximum temperatures are 28C between May and October and 30C in the rainy season.

■ **Accommodation at Five-Star Fiji:** prices include all meals, drinks and activities (rates are subject to 10 per cent Fijian tax). Reservations and further information from Travel Portfolio (01284 762255), Wakaya Club (minimum five-night stay) from £645 per couple per day; flight transfer £15 return per couple. Turtle Island (minimum

six-night stay): from £630 per couple per day; seaplane transfer costs £440 return for two. Vatulele Island (minimum four-night stay): from £548 for two a day; flight transfer costs £304 fore two return.

■ **Health:** Fiji does not suffer from tropical diseases and inoculation is not required. The water is safe to drink everywhere.

■ **There is a departure tax of 20 Fijian dollars. Keep some cash because cheques and credit cards are not accepted here.**

■ **Reading:** The Travel Bookshop (0171-229 5260) recommends *In Search of Tustala* by Gavin Bell (Picador, £6.99, ISBN 0 330 34245 2); *Pacific Mythology* by Jan Knappert (Diamond Books, £8.99, ISBN 0 261 66655 X); *Happy Isles of Oceania* by Paul Theroux (Penguin, £6.99, ISBN 0 140 15976 2); *South Pacific Handbook* by David Stanley (Moon Publications, £14.99, ISBN 1 566 91040 4).

visionary and former aviator who found his personal fulfilment in the Pacific. The resort, in his absence, is managed by Joe Naisali, a huge and friendly Fijian from a neighbouring island, who appeared in the Brooke Shields film *The Blue Lagoon*, which was shot on location on Turtle Island.

Much of Turtle Island remains under mangrove swamp or dense forest and Mr Evanson has done much to restore the original eco-system after it had been ravaged by free-range goats.

Memories never to be forgotten include riding horses along the beach at sunrise before a champagne breakfast and watching the release of the turtles. The resort offers cash for all turtles caught and then marks the shells. This renders them valueless to poachers and souvenir hunters and is harmless to the turtles. The waddle down the beach once they are released is followed by a spectacular break for

freedom as they hit the water at torpedo-like speed.

The staff enjoy socialising with the guests and, late at night, will keep an especially warm welcome for any visitor who joins the singing and strumming of two magnificent guitars left to the staff by an appreciative Eddie van Halen. The American rock musician while, again, the *kava* bowl is generously circulated.

Most of the late-night conversation consists of anecdotes of drinking contests with rival villages and tales of falling down when the *kava* bowl is empty. It is rank bad manners for anyone to leave before the huge wooden bowl has been drained.

Leaving the island for home has been known to reduce guests to tears. The entire staff come to the waterside and sing *Isa Lei*, a beautiful, haunting song of leaving that has an

African-sounding melody. It can be a lengthy goodbye — particularly when, as happened to us, excess weight prevents the seaplane from getting airborne. Luggage had to be unloaded to be sent on later before we could take off.

Our last island hop was our favourite. Vatulele differs from the other properties in Five Star Fiji in that the resort does not own the entire island and there are four villages where it is possible to get a glimpse of Fijian life.

Foremost among local crafts is the making of the *tapa* cloth from the mulberry tree. The bark is beaten by the women until it stretches from an inch wide to seven or eight inches. Several layers are then added until a cloth about three feet wide is created. Many of the women are deaf from beating the bark for up to 12 hours a day. A better, and certainly quieter, job is decorating the *tapa* in the traditional tan and black designs. A cloth, which

will have taken an entire day to make, costs less than £5, and an afternoon spent watching the process is fascinating.

Vatulele also offers excellent diving, fine cuisine, 3,000-year-old petroglyphs, caves and magnificent *bures* built on a Santa Fe design from New Mexico, which seems to suggest an ancient connection between the native American peoples and the islanders of the south Pacific.

Vatulele's style is less private than Wakaya but not as communal as Turtle Island. We found it the perfect balance. In addition to the trips to the village, two experiences stand out. One was a boat trip for a private picnic on the uninhabited Nooki Nooki Island, a wonderful bird sanctuary on what is little more than an pebble in the ocean.

The other element that makes Vatulele unique is the wit and wisdom of Martin Livingston, the artist, sculptor and *bon vivant* who manages the resort. Mr Livingston always joins his guests for meals, where he ribs them gently about their quirks and foibles. The stuffy could find his humour offensive, but most visitors love it, because he likes to weave tales.

On the first night he told all and sundry that I was in the timber industry and was in Fiji to chop down a few hundred acres of hardwoods in the rain forest. What he knew, and we didn't, was that several other guests were of a strongly ecological persuasion. We received some deeply shocked looks until our co-friends realised that they, too, had been well and truly Livingstoned. Bula, bula.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON.

● The author was a guest of Travel Portfolio, Wakaya Club, Turtle Island and Vatulele Island



Fijian culture is the best preserved in the South Pacific

Stunning grog with a rural scene to match

I get bored on beaches, even ones as perfect as Fiji's: white sand, coconut palms, sunbathing, snorkelling, and so on. All very nice, but I'd been in Fiji for a week and hadn't spoken to one Fijian, beyond a few pleasantries to staff at the resort. I wanted to see the other side of the country, if there was one, away from the resorts.

After a browse through my *Lonely Planet* guidebook I decided on the village of Navala, in the hills of Viti Levu, Fiji's main island.

In fact, there are three Fijis. The tourist beaches are one. The second is the traditional Fijian villages, but to reach them I had to go through a third Fiji: small, bustling coastal towns full of the Indian migrants who constitute half the nation's population.

The town where I changed buses, Ba, might have been in India: shops selling aromatic spices, Indian sweet stalls, women in saris, curry houses, signs in Hindi and Urdu.

Leaving Ba, the old British Leyland bus roared off in a cloud of dust and exhaust fumes. It struggled up steep inclines, tilting at angles that only Third World buses can manage. The sugar plantations of the hot coastal plains gave way to rugged hills, cliffs of black volcanic rock, jutting out of dry yellow grass. And then, in a valley over a last hill, there was Navala.

The village, on a grassy, sloping riverbank, is one of the few in Fiji still built entirely of *bures* (pronounced boo-rays). About 60 of these thatched-roof houses stood in neat rows, surrounded by flowers, coconut palms and vegetable patches. Children ran between them; some youths played touch rugby, and men carrying machetes returned from the sugar fields. In the surrounding hills, fires burned as part of a wild boar hunt. It looked beautiful, a perfect little self-contained world.

It reminded me of an African village, though any likeness of the dark-skinned Fijians to Africans is misleading: Fijians are Melanesians who migrated from South-East Asia, not Africa.

Then I was shown into the home of the village chief. It was one large room, the floor covered in palm mats, except for two beds and a wardrobe. On the wall were family photographs, and those of the Fijian prime minister and the Pope.

The chief was a round-bellied, greying man, in jeans and a sweatshirt. He invited me to drink some grog, or *yakwana*, made from a ground-root plant called *kava*. It is the traditional Fijian brew, drunk mainly by men. It is slightly narcotic and numbing, I'd heard that too much could cause you to lose all muscular control. I was a little disappointed to find that we were still perfectly coordinated when dinner arrived — a tasty stew of wild pig, fresh from the hunt.

I spent the night on a mattress on the floor, sharing the room with the chief's son, John, his wife and their child.

Next morning, everyone went to church, "cos we Catholics, see". Having heard that visitors are often asked to deliver a sermon, I explored the village, instead, accompanied by the inevitable entourage of skipping and giggling

children. A woman invited me into a *bure* to meet "the village netball team" — and the conversation quickly reached a familiar stage.

"You married?"
"No."
"Oh, (A pause) 'Single'?"
"I have a girlfriend."

In Third World villages, people tend to work on the principle that any single (western) gentle man, presumably in possession of a fortune, must necessarily be in need of a wife. For anyone travelling alone, a girlfriend (or boyfriend) is necessary fiction if you don't have the real thing handy.

For once, Fiji is a place where the colonial legacy seems positive. Christianity ending years of rampant cannibalism. The British never invaded but were invited, in the mid-19th century, to take over the islands by the fearsome Chief Cakabu — said to have personally killed and eaten 80 men — to stop bloody inter-tribal warfare. The British, not surprisingly, initially turned down the offer.

Sir Arthur Gordon, the first governor, decreed that no land could be sold to a non-Fijian, and no native labour could be used on the new sugar plantations. He also left the traditional village chief system in place and, as a result, Fijian culture is the best-preserved in the South Pacific.

The other side of the British decision not to exploit native labour was the importation of workers from India. Someone had to keep the sugar mills supplied and Sir Arthur wasn't about to do the work himself. Denied access to land, the Indians in Fiji developed an industrious business ethic and now run the economy.

Two more contrasting cultures are hard to imagine. The Indians, living in small towns on the coast, are hard-working, eager to make money and keen for progress. The Fijians are relaxed and conservative and sit around for hours, drinking grog.

The British also installed an abiding affection for two of their favourite upper-class institutions: the Royal Family and rugby union, both almost obsessions in Fiji.

The most common questions I was asked — after "Where you from?" and "You married?" — were, "You play rugby?" and "How is Princess Di?"

Next morning I caught the bus down the pot-holed road to the Indian supermarkets and sari shops of Ba, and from there I travelled back to my beach paradise.

In two days I'd learnt just a little about Fiji, but it was more than I would have in a month at the beach.

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Northumberland: At the turn of the tide each day Lindisfarne returns to its island state and venerable past

Isle of war and peace

Twice daily a narrow, mile-long neck of land sinks beneath the North Sea for five hours, uncoupling Lindisfarne, also known as Holy Island, from the Northumberland coast. Having consulted the tidal chart, I strode off along the Pilgrims' Causeway, cutting through mud flats. It was like crossing an infinity of shiny chocolate puddings.

The liquid call of countless curlews floated across the emptiness. Through binoculars I watched them dip their long, curved beaks into the mud, pulling out wriggling lugworms. The mud popped and whistled, letting off fleeting, fetid odours which mingled with a salty zephyr wafting off the sea.

As I progressed, Lindisfarne's huge, monolithic, castle-crowned rock encircled by sand dunes, green farmland and the blackened remains of a great priory, appeared out of the morning mist.

Over the centuries, islanders have been monks, fishermen and farmers. Nowadays it is more lucrative to offer bed and breakfast, run tea shops or sell Lindisfarne mead. The island is the jewel in the crown of the "Northumbrian Heritage" industry, and sees thousands of tourists.

"This bridge is totally submerged at high tide" warns a blunt road sign at the end of the causeway. It might also usefully add, "And these mud flats disappear more quickly than you would believe possible". I thought, as a single, shallow wave raced in, engulfing acres after acres much faster than most people can run.

Thank goodness for the tide. As the last crossing time approached, day visitors hurried to their cars to join a single-file, migratory route

back to the A1. Soon after, Lindisfarne turned back into an island and its singular atmosphere re-emerged.

I walked round the perimeter wall just above the high-water level and climbed up on to the bluffs to listen in solitude to the wind and the gulls and the waves breaking on the black rocks below.

Later, I wandered among the ruined arches and columns of the 1,000-year-old priory, on the green turf where a great flagstone once lay. It seemed an appropriate place to reflect on the island's history.

In AD 635 St Aidan was sent by St Columba to establish Lindisfarne as his base and convert the powerful warrior heathens of Northumbria to an alien religion demanding peace and contemplation. Within a century, according to the Venerable Bede, the great scholar who recorded this era, "many Northumbrians, both noble and simple, laid aside their weapons, preferring to take monastic vows than study the art of war".

Was this why Northumberland seemed defenceless against the raping, pillaging and havoc-wreaking Norsemen the following century?

The monks were slaughtered or driven out, but 200 years later others returned to rebuild the priory. They stayed until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. Later that century, most of the stones from the priory were taken to build Lindisfarne Castle as part of the war effort against the Scots.

Pacifism may be less popular in the late 20th century than it was a millennium and a half ago, but the ethereal influence of the early Lindisfarne Christians lives on in



Lindisfarne Castle, encircled by sand dunes and farmland, was built in the late 16th century as part of the English war effort against the Scots

aura, legend and folklore. St Aidan, Bede and, most of all, St Cuthbert are all still revered. The latter was a shepherd-turned monk who meditated in solitude on the island of Inner Farne for nine years before becoming Bishop of Lindisfarne. He is credited with countless miracles and his tomb is the holiest shrine in Durham Cathedral.

To follow Cuthbert's footsteps to the Farne Islands, I returned to the mainland and drove ten miles down the coast, past the looming fortress of Bamburgh. Northumberland is peppered with such strongholds as constant reminders of the almost incessant hostility between Scots

and English, which the message of the Celtic Christians proved powerless to prevent.

At the fishing port and holiday village of Seahouses, I joined a boat tour of the Farne Islands, which are scattered between two-and-a-half and eight miles off the coast.

In all there are 28 of these islands, some sinking and re-emerging with the tide. The highest rise 100ft above sea level, their characteristic fluted stacks with angular corners looking as if they have been sliced off a larger chunk of land.

The archipelago is owned by the National Trust and is inhabited only by a few light-

house keepers and wildlife wardens, who share the islands with hundreds of thousands of seabirds and several herds of seals.

Landings are permitted on two of the larger islands, Inner Farne and Staple. Most tours from Seahouses spend about an hour on one of these islands, and a couple more weaving among the others.

My trip rounded the lighthouse on Longstone, one of the furthest islands, from where the young heroine Grace Darling, famous throughout northeast England, launched her courageous rescue of the shipwrecked crew of the *Forfarshire* in 1838. Then we stopped to bob about, watch-

ing fat, slumbering seals and their pups basking on the rocks before regaining their grace when they slid back into the water.

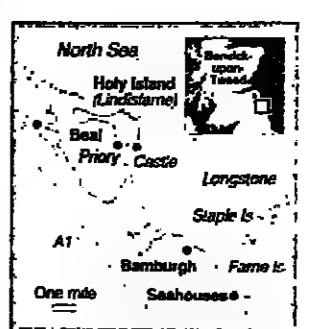
The birds are super-abundant. Inner Farne, where we landed, has one of the largest colonies of puffins in the British Isles. I also watched crowds of sleek razor-bills, ugly herring gulls and mottled oyster ducks. The nesting, red-beaked Arctic terns were less welcoming. I saw one dive on an innocent visitor, a middle-aged woman who was clearly regarded as an intruder, as she stepped ashore. Blood was drawn and the attack was successful in that she retreated angrily into

St Cuthbert's chapel, only to re-emerge, clutching a book on top of her head, when it was time to leave.

The chapel is built on the site where the saint meditated alone in his cell. However, amid the cacophony of seabirds and day-trippers, it was hard to take oneself back to that age.

I cannot help feeling that it would be a different story if one could spend a night alone there, dwelling on the "demons in cowls, their heads long, their countenances most hideous", which Cuthbert described and is believed to have vanquished.

MARTIN SYMINGTON



FACT FILE

■ How to get there: Lindisfarne is about ten miles south of Berwick-upon-Tweed and the Scottish border. Information on tides is displayed at both ends of the causeway, or ring 01289 330733 (Mon-Sat 10am-1pm, 3-4pm). Boat tours of the Farne Islands leave from Seahouses in April to the end of September. These are cancelled in bad weather.

■ Where to stay: on Lindisfarne, try the Lindisfarne Hotel (01289 330733, £40 for double B&B). In Seahouses is the Old Ship Inn (01665 720200), £60 for double B&B. Also recommended is Marshall Meadows Hotel (01289 331133), £90 for double B&B.

■ What to see: Ainslie Castle (01665 510777) is still the main seat of the Duke of Northumberland but open to the public. It has the Regimental Museum of Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, and Capability Brown gardens. Workwear Castle (01665 711423) is medieval in character with a dark, austere keep. Shakespeare set several scenes of *Henry IV* here, dramatising the intrigue between the Earl of Northumberland and his son Harry Hotspur. Bamburgh (01668 214208) in its heyday was a royal castle where the kings of Northumbria were crowned. It fell into ruin and has been restored in a bizarre Victorian style. The Grace Darling Museum (01668 214465), also in Bamburgh, celebrates the heroine's life and displays her lifeboat. She died of TB in 1842 at the age of 26, and is buried in the graveyard opposite.

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JILL CRAWSHAW'S INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL TIPS

Calvia clean-up

HAS MAGALUF gone soft? The Majorcan resort, where ten years ago I couldn't find the beach among the skyscrapers and lager-lout bars, is introducing Tai Chi exercises on the beach, as well as tea dances, Spanish language and cookery lessons.

It's all part of the Calvia region's clean-up, which has cost £78 million since 1990 and is aimed at transforming Magaluf, Palma Nova, Santa Ponsa and Illa de la Concha into resorts fit for human beings (preferably families).

Next resort on the hit-list is Paguera, which has excellent beaches but a thoroughly scruffy main road. About £46 million has been earmarked for improvement.

Cruise début

THOUGH latecomers to cruising, Britain's largest tour operator, Thomson Holidays (0990 302555), is going full steam ahead with a programme of cruises for 74,000 passengers next year. Prices start at £399 for a week out of Palma in November — though £600 is the average weekly cost.

Following a successful winter in the Caribbean, Thomson is to introduce three and four-night cruises from the

Bahamas taking in Miami, Key West and Coco Cay, on board Royal Caribbean Line's 2,518-passenger *Sovereign of the Seas*. A two-week package, with four nights at sea and ten ashore in an all-inclusive hotel in Nassau, costs from £1,259.

A two-week cruise-and-stay holiday with one week in a Dominican Republic hotel and another on board Norwegian Caribbean Line's 1,500 passenger *Seawind*, costs £1,115-£1,259, sailing from Santo Domingo.

Turf 'n' surf

RANCH holidays probably owe as much to the authentic old Wild West as Africa's wildlife does to Mickey Mouse (on one I tried in the Caskills, no one was allowed to canter because of "insurance" problems), but they can be fun and offer reasonably active holidays in nice places.

Ranch America (0181-866 2970) will steer competent riders to more adventurous establishments. The David Ranch in Wyoming, for example, is a full-working range with 6,000 head of cattle, and holidaymakers may be asked to herd, brand, learn how to fix a fence or how to rope. The cost is £1,290 fully inclusive.

Twin Peaks Ranch, Idaho, offers a turf 'n' surf combination of riding coupled with white-water rafting on the River Salmon, which runs through the ranch. The cost is £1,590, inclusive for a week.

Kuoni (01306 742222) has introduced holidays in dude ranches in Arizona costing from £946 a week.



Would-be dudes can ride 'em cowboy style on working-ranch holidays in America

Cost-cutters

A SERIES of low-price city breaks, valid from January 1 to March 19, 1997, has been launched by British Airways Holidays. Prices start at £99 for a night with B&B in Paris, £115 in Amsterdam. Three

Holy trail

A NEW eight-day walk along St Cuthbert's Way from Melrose to Bamburgh, Scotland, is offered by Sherpa Expeditions (0181-577 2717). The walk links abbeys, castles, market towns and moorlands associated with the 7th century saint. One night is spent in Lindisfarne (Holy Island). Self-guided walks cost £385 (escorted £450), which include B&B in inns, routes and baggage transport.

The best wine bars on the grapevine

Although France is more than self-assured about the quality of its wines, tongue-scaring stuff is still served in many cafes. This is why the French drink so much Kir as an aperitif: the crème de cassis or blackcurrant liqueur kills the blechy taste of cheap white wine. A great improvement on this is the revival of the Cardinal, which couples crème de mûre (blackberry) with a chilled, light-red wine such as Gamay or Sancerre.

For a superior glass, however, the sensible Parisian attends his local wine bar, particularly at lunchtime when food, especially cheese, a step above café fare, is served. Wine bar owners have a reputation to keep. Their vintages are carefully chosen, often specialising in a specific area such as the Rhône, Bordeaux or the Loire, and customers and owners can indulge in pretentious and useful discussion of each bottle.

For those who are not wine buffs, a few hours' work at the zinc in a wine bar can result in knowledge useful for purchasing a case. Many Paris wine bars also sell wine from their cellars by the bottle or dozen to take home.

Le Rubis, an ancient institution just down from the Opéra, is your traditional wine bar, with savoury on the floors and barrels on which to stand your glass. After tasting, you can buy bottles to take away. It is noisy, amusing and packed, particularly when the Beaujolais Nouveau is launched.

All over Paris, it seems, there are branches of L'Ecluse wine bar — a reliable chain with good wines which lacks eccentricity but is better than falling into the nearest café.

Perhaps the best-decorated wine bar in the city is the Clown Bar, next door to the old Cirque d'Hiver building, which is tiled with circus and clown motifs. The wine is served in generous glasses.

Although French-style wine bars invaded Britain long ago, revenge has been taken by an Englishman, Mark Williamson, who opened Will's Wine Bar in the business district 16 years ago, and its offshoot, Juveniles, more recently. Will's has superb food and a cellar which varies from the

offbeat to the grand. Wines by the glass, which you wish were larger, cost Fr16-Fr70 (about £2-£8). The bar specialises in wines from the Rhône, the South West and Provence, sherries, and what the owner describes as "fun wines" from Italy, Spain and California.

The specials change every day. Last Monday he had a fine 1993 Mersault from Pierre Morey, and a Domaine de Trevallon Cabernet Sauvignon of the same year from Provence.

Although Will's does not sell selections from its cellar, Juveniles will supply wine by the case. Bottles usually cost Fr16-Fr30, and is of more recent vintage.

Mr Williamson says his clientele was mostly French until the Channel Tunnel opened. At lunchtime, workers pour in to Will's from the Bourse or ministries nearby. The other night at dinner, however, we were trapped at a table between four London accountants and American businessmen and women from New Jersey, expertly mistranslating the menu.

KATE MUIR

● L'Ecluse, (Paris chain), 64 Rue François-Ier, 8th (47 27 77 09). Will's, 13 Rue de Petit-Champs, 1st (42 61 03 09). Le Rubis, 10 Rue du Marché-Saint-Etienne, 1st (42 61 03 34). Bistro des Augustins, 39 Quai de Grand-Augustins, 6th (43 54 41 65). Juveniles, 47 Rue de Richelieu, 1st (47 97 46 49). Clown Bar, 114 Rue Amelot, 11th (43 55 37 35).



with much discussion. On the Left Bank, the Bistro des Augustins is charming, with an Art Deco bar and lighting, delicious sourdough *Pain de Poilâne*, runny cheeses and homemade puddings. Again, wines can be taken away.

Although French-style wine bars invaded Britain long ago, revenge has been taken by an Englishman, Mark Williamson, who opened Will's Wine Bar in the business district 16 years ago, and its offshoot, Juveniles, more recently. Will's has superb food and a cellar which varies from the

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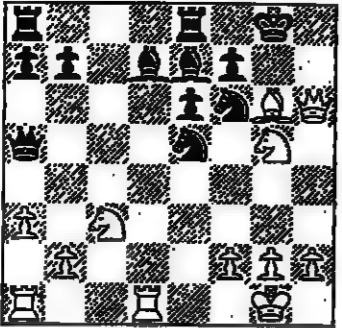
by Raymond Keene

FROM Monday to Friday, your reward for solving the Winning Move puzzle is the warm glow of pride in your achievement. At Christmas, though, a more tangible gratification is on offer, namely a generous supply of champagne for the winner.

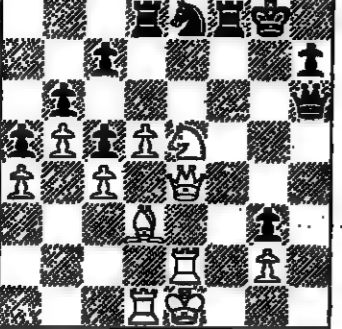
Here are four positions to test your chess skills over the Christmas break. In each case I require the first move only. The reward for the winner is a jereboam of Moët & Chandon champagne.

Gipsy-Pushketa
Berlin 1995
White to play

White has sacrificed a piece in order to cluster his attacking forces around the black king. The obvious try is 1 Bh7+, but after 1... Kh8 can White make progress, or does White have something stronger in the initial position?

Gonzalez-Bravo
Havana 1995
Black to play

A pawn which has marched close to the enemy king can be extremely dangerous. How did Black exploit the presence of his pawn on g3?



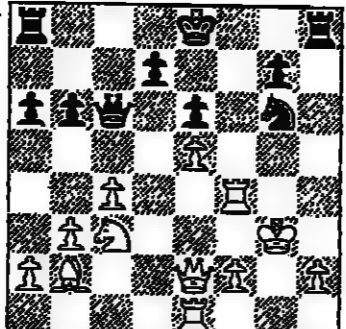
WINNING MOVE

By Raymond Keene
White to play. This position is from the game Jacobo - Jackson, London 1979. In this position, which arose from the King's Gambit, White has relinquished four pawns in an attempt to create active piece play on the kingside. How did it pay off? Send your answers on a postcard to *The Times*, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. The first correct solution drawn on Monday, December 30, will receive a year's subscription to the Staunton Society, including a free invitation to the annual dinner at Simpson's-in-the-Strand.

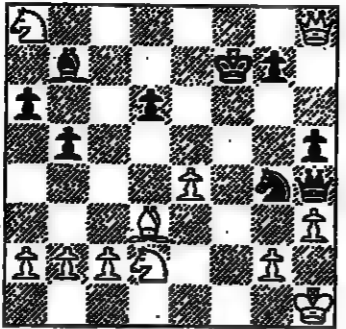
The solution will appear in two weeks' time.

Kacakovski-Szabaneck
Paris 1995
Black to play

In this position, White is not just a piece up but seems better developed and better centralised. Is this the case?

Yanes-Foyo, Cuba 1995
Black to play

A piece down, it hardly seems likely that Black can force perpetual check, let alone win. Is there a surprise?

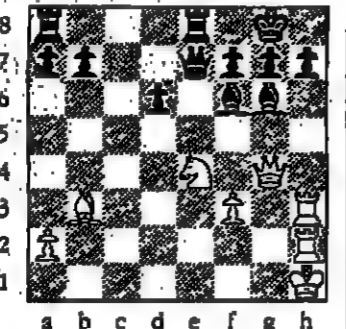


Answers should reach me at *The Times* no later than January 3, 1997, addressed to: Chess Christmas Quiz, *The Times*, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN.

Normal *Times* competition rules apply. The winner will be the first answer drawn out of a hat which solves all four puzzles correctly.

Those readers who solve all four positions (and I shall give themselves a pat on the back. One of them, and I shall not say which, defeated my columnist — and I had to look up how the game continued.

Last week's solution: 1 Bx7+ (1... Rxd7 2 Nc4 traps the black queen). Last week's winner: J Wilks-Jones, The Hidden House, Beaumaris, Anglesey.



a b c d e f g h

Champagne
MOËT & CHANDON

FOR the Christmas Punchline competition, readers are invited to write an amusing caption for the cartoon (right), from *The Strand Magazine* (reproduced with permission from Westminster Libraries, Sherlock Holmes Collection, Marylebone Library). The winner will receive a jereboam of Moët & Chandon champagne. Send caption suggestions on a postcard with your name and address to: Strand Caption (31), *Weekend, The Times*, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN. The Editor's decision is final. The closing date for entries is January 1, 1997.



"Spades, stakes, mallets — that'll be twenty quid Dr Van Heising. Make sure they're back by sunrise."

The winning caption for last week's cartoon (above) was submitted by Brian Lockert of London.

THIS week the Games page adds extra sparkle to the satisfaction of pitting your wits against the quiz masters and the puzzle setters. As a festive incentive there are jereboams of Moët & Chandon champagne for the winners of the Bridge, Chess, Computer Games, Punchline and the Waterstones Crossword. Normal *Times* competition rules apply. The judges' decision is final and they cannot enter into correspondence.



WORD-WATCHING

By Philip Howard

VOLVOX

- a. A fresh-water ball
- b. A Swedish automobile
- c. An involuntary cry

WENTLETRAP

- a. A dog-cart
- b. A pitfall
- c. A shell

ZANDER

- a. A wise lawyer
- b. A fish
- c. Unleavened bread

VAMPLET

- a. A Lolita
- b. A handkerchief
- c. A gaiter

Answers on page 15

CHRISTMAS COMPUTER GAMES AND PASTIMES QUIZ

by Tim Wapshott



Donald Duck is the mascot of which American university?

- A. Isabella
- B. Frances
- C. Elizabeth

- 11. Which act of 1940 prevented UK employers giving canteen meals in lieu of wages?
- A. Truck Act
- B. Factories Act
- C. Employment Act

- 12. *Homo sapiens* is a scientific name for modern man. What is the meaning of the Latin word *sapiens*?

- 10. Anthony Trollope's mother was a prolific novelist and travel writer. What was her first name?

- 8. Which German-born pianist and conductor died in England in 1948 and settled in Manchester where he founded the celebrated orchestra which bears his name?
- A. Weber
- B. Heller
- C. Spohr

- 9. What kind of creatures are bees, brili and hake?
- A. Fish
- B. Reptiles
- C. Birds

- 7. Who was the father of Cleopatra's son, Ptolemy XV?
- A. Julius Caesar?
- B. Mark Antony
- C. Her brother, Ptolemy

- 6. In what 1956 movie does alien plant life take over a small California town?
- A. Invasion of the Body Snatchers
- B. Tremors
- C. The Blob

- 5. Where was Princess Elizabeth, the future British Queen, when she heard of the death of her father, George VI?
- A. Kenya
- B. Balmoral
- C. India

- 4. In what 1956 movie does alien plant life take over a small California town?
- A. Invasion of the Body Snatchers
- B. Tremors
- C. The Blob

- 3. In what 1956 movie does alien plant life take over a small California town?
- A. Invasion of the Body Snatchers
- B. Tremors
- C. The Blob

- 2. In what 1956 movie does alien plant life take over a small California town?
- A. Invasion of the Body Snatchers
- B. Tremors
- C. The Blob

- 1. In what 1956 movie does alien plant life take over a small California town?
- A. Invasion of the Body Snatchers
- B. Tremors
- C. The Blob

THE WATERSTONE'S CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

No 3389: Waterstone's by Ricshaw

THE perimeter consists of four unclued thematic elements. All answers are entered normally. Across clues contain an extra letter which must be removed before solving, the clue after removal being cryptically, though not always grammatically sound. These extra letters in order give the start of a quotation. Down answers are defined correctly but cryptic indications lead to the answer with one letter advanced in the alphabet by some value (using A=1 to Z=26 and going "round the end" where necessary). These added values give the completion of the quotation and its speaker. Apart from some proper names all entries are given by *Chambers* (1993).

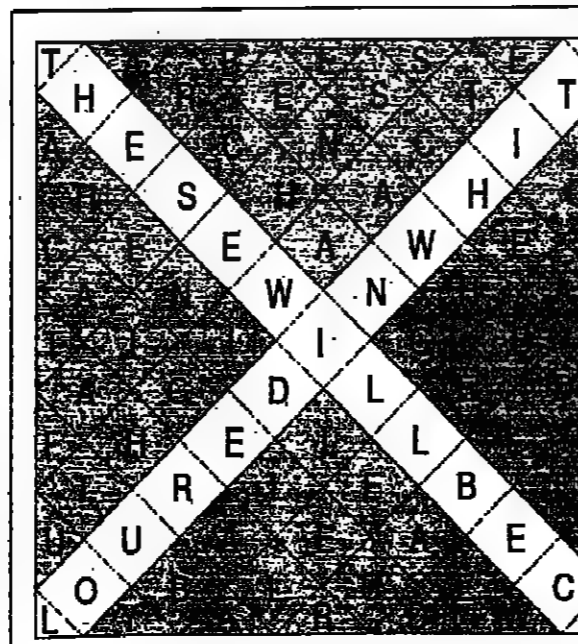
ACROSS

- 10. Single fault in American edition (7)
- 13. A rugby back on line, getting one knockout point for Harrow (5)
- 15. Harms Scot eyes with insufficient acquaintance (7)
- 16. Something like a morsel with density and texture (5)
- 17. They provide protection for my entry into squalid areas pursuing Australian (7)
- 18. Could carrier be back in prison nearly after one? (6)
- 19. He takes stock of tough screw according to Spooner (7)
- 20. Born Free's one featured in Movie Institute lesson (7)
- 22. Pict worker, rumour has it, is one under age (5)
- 23. K even sold running shoe to South Africa — more than a scandal! (9)
- 28. Whisper stammered okay about Starr returning, not lead (5)
- 29. Wearing dress with the hard back acquired by limited edition (5)
- 30. Corrupt private secretary, forced to retire, wept (7)
- 33. Unusually going outside to lay out rope that's close to tearing (7)
- 36. Take away protection from bone with old probe (6)
- 37. One accepting risky political office loses important letter here! (7)

- 38. Impressive! Not many spent recklessly, endlessly (5)
- 39. Disparate authors have written about this creature (7)
- 40. Maiden loses head in statue that's stunted (5)
- 41. He's brought in to pin a klaim back for India (7)

DOWN

- 2. Bad luck over street robbery (5)
- 3. Enjoy oneself in America with sailor? Whichever way you look at it, that's fishy (6)
- 4. Salome dancing gets head of theologian's body (5)
- 5. Cape forward dives, securing three points (9)
- 6. Also I secured support for branch destroyed in fire (7)
- 7. Cooked rare, note, one is a 'bloody' problem (7)
- 8. Girl, possibly foreign, from Greek city turning native (7)
- 11. Avoid work, cutting lawn with this? (5)
- 12. Female shark certainly unknown in America (7)
- 14. Early saint's country (7)
- 21. Servant's given small amount by custom with little time to finish off chore (9)
- 24. He has made particular provision for law about handgun coming to nothing (7)
- 25. Drunken Scots in rowing boat having harmonious relationship (7)
- 26. Tart's client's eccentric man about town (7)
- 27. Food shop finding most of fruit decay is able to be removed (7)
- 28. Antique cunningly made with dainty interior is impressive (7)
- 31. A fool, I did Ring in reverse on first of cycles (6)
- 32. Lightweight material used by lovely drag-artist (5)
- 34. Macintosh's query as to source as to source of weak musical (5)
- 35. Lament Australian's presence in pool (5)



Solution to No 3386:
Eight Ways by Alcum

Completed intermediate diagram. Solvers were expected to send a solution with the colours only, no letters showing.

Answers:

- 1 Tacful, 2 Archangelic, 3 Besse, 4 Escheat, 5 Stick, 6 Eta, 7 Aha, 8 Nailer, 9 Cher, 10 Wane, 11 Kabele, 12 Aesc, 13 Wight, 14 Hebe, 15 Tahr, 16 Idle, 17 Glad, 18 Blew, 19 Taco, 20 Lev, 21 Faine, 22 Tuba, 23 Elegiac, 24 Ball, 25 Lar, 26 Cid, 27 Yard, 28 You

The winners are J.P. and E.A. Ruff of Eastleigh, Hampshire

The two runners-up are R. Tyler of Exeter and Mr and Mrs P.C. Hall of Poole, Dorset

CHRISTMAS BRIDGE QUIZ

by Robert Sheehan

WHERE it is relevant, you are playing good-quality rubber bridge. Partially-correct answers will be awarded a reduced score.

1 These are the North-South cards:

♠ 2
♥ 5432
♦ 5432
♣ 5432

♠ N
♥ E
♦ S
♣ W

♠ KQJ10
♥ KQJ
♦ KQJ
♣ KQJ

The auction has been:

1NT 2C
2S 3NT
What is your lead? (10 points)
5 You are East on the hand below. This has been the auction:

S W N E
1C Pass 1D Pass
1S Pass 2D Pass
2NT Pass All Pass

♠ 72
♥ A532
♦ KJ10873
♣ J

♠ N
♥ E
♦ S
♣ W

♠ 72
♥ A532
♦ KJ10873
♣ J

Neither opponent has a suit longer than four cards. How many tricks can you guarantee in a No-Trump contract? (10 points)

2 (i) How do you play this hand in 7NT on a spade lead. East playing the queen? (5 points)
(ii) In what circumstances does correct play gain? (5 points)

♠ 442
♥ A843
♦ none
♣ AKQ1098

♠ N
♥ E
♦ S
♣ W

♠ AJS
♥ Q
♦ AKQJ1087
♣ 84

3 Your partner deals and opens One Spade and you hold:

♠ AKJ6 ♥ AKJ1083 ♦ J ♣ J9
What do you reply? (10 points)

4 You are on lead from this hand:

♠ KQ1032 ♥ A62 ♦ 754 ♣ 63

Your partner leads the queen of spades; declarer wins with the king and returns the nine of diamonds, running it to your queen. How do you plan the defence? (10 points)

Send your answers to the Christmas Bridge Competition, *The Times*, 1 Pennington Street, London E1 9XN by Friday, January 3, 1997.

Anyone who has played international bridge in the past five years will be handicapped 5 points. The winners' names will be published on Saturday, January 11. The first prize is a jereboam of Moët & Chandon champagne.

Second, third and fourth prizes will be annual subscriptions to one of the main bridge magazines (*International Popular Bridge*, *Bridge Magazine* and *Bridge Plus*). Six prizes, allotted by random draw from all non-prize winners, will be copies of *More Bridge*, edited by Elena Jeronimidis.

Good luck!

of the Wars of the Roses, fought in 1485?

- A. Battle of Bosworth Field
- B. Battle of York
- C. Battle of Agincourt

20. What was Groucho Marx's real name?

- A. Julius
- B. Leonard
- C. Herbert

21. Which 13th century charter granted by King John, was seen as guaranteeing human rights against the excessive use of royal power?

- A. Magna Carta
- B. Domesday Book
- C. Mappa Mundi

22. In which fantasy movie does a young girl wish for her younger brother to be taken away?

- A. Gremlins
- B. The Neverending Story
- C. Labyrinth

23. What did Pope Paul III do to Henry VIII and Pope Sixtus V do to Elizabeth I?

- A. Honour
- B. Marry
- C. Excommunicate

24. Donald Duck is the mascot of which university?

- A. Tallahassee State
- B. Oregon
- C. Washington State

25. Which Hollywood actor was Governor of California from 1966-74, and US President from 1981-89?

- A. John Wayne
- B. Ronald Reagan
- C. Marlon Brando

WATERSTONE'S CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD No 3389

NAME
ADDRESS

Cut out and send the completed crossword and coupon above to The Waterstone's Christmas Crossword No 3389, 63 Green Lane, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 6HE, by Friday, January 3, 1997.

W
WATERSTONE'S

The winner of The Waterstone's Christmas Crossword will receive a £75 voucher and a jereboam of Moët & Chandon champagne. Five runners-up will each receive a £10 voucher

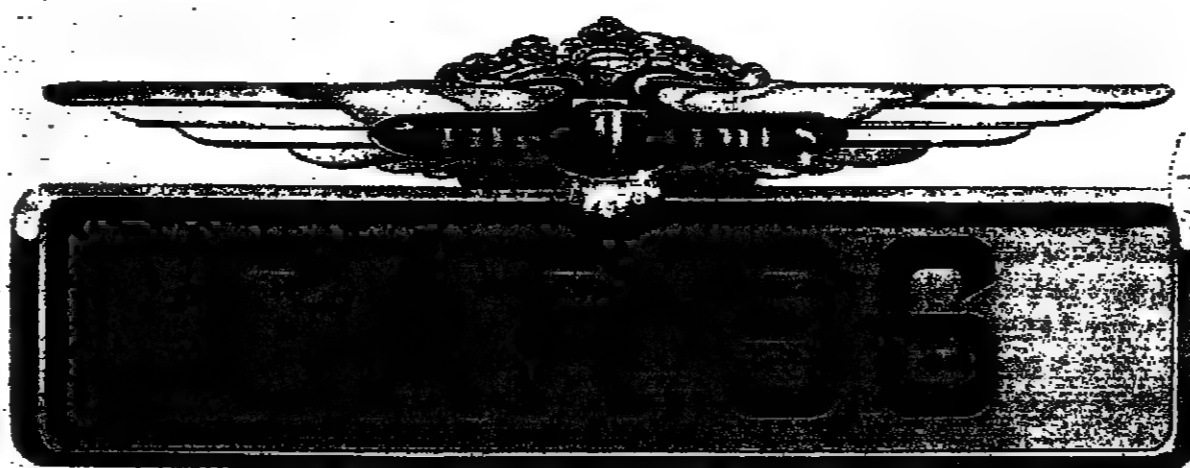


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Off-road Explorer puts Ford in big league

Page 3



Gem restored for a lucky winner

Page 5



SATURDAY DECEMBER 21 1996

You may as well ask for Rudolph

Kevin Eason on some presents Santa Claus will not leave under many trees this year



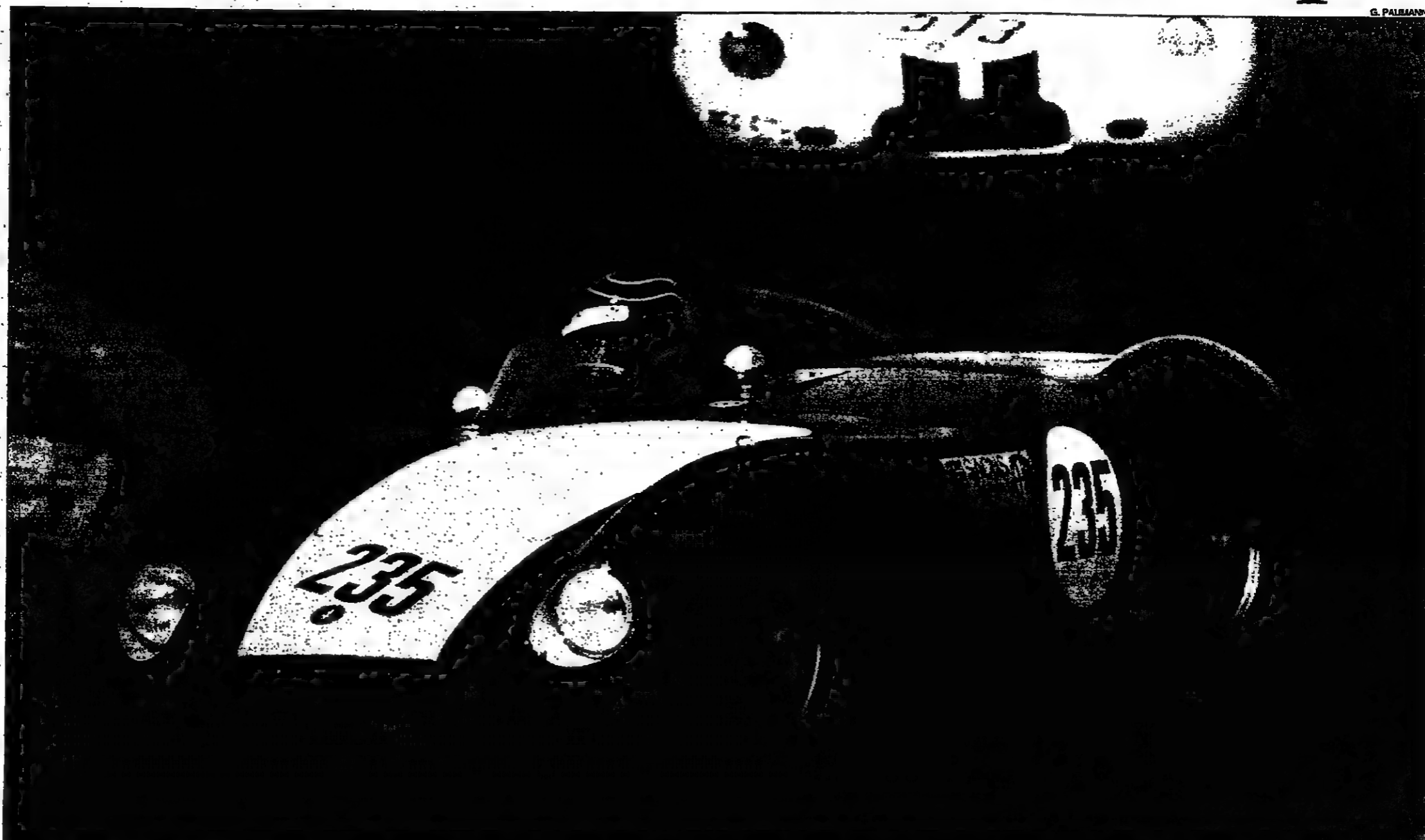
Hartley: "Lots of people will be disappointed."

There are bad tidings that bulge in your Christmas stocking is only a tangerine. The nearest you are going to get to that little sports car you dreamt about for Christmas is a Dinky toy unless you asked Santa months ago.

For this is the Christmas when Santa's sack is bare of all the most desirable toys. Fine wishfully for your Mercedes SLK, Porsche Boxster, Jaguar XK8 or MGF because there is none to be had anywhere in Britain.

The SLK has not only sold out, dealers this week were refusing deposits because waiting lists are an average two years. Go to some Mercedes showrooms and a glum salesman will tell you to wait as long as four years, such is worldwide demand for Mercedes' cute £30,000 sportsster.

Even if you look for an alternative to the SLK, you will have plenty of time to knit a nice new stocking for the end of your bed because it will be next Christmas before the waiting lists clear on most of



For the man who has everything: you can buy him a Maserati 300S — the finest sports car Stirling Moss ever drove — for £500,000. The price is not likely to drop in the January sales if you decide to wait

the others in the top ten seasonal "wish list": at least a year each for the BMW Z3 and the Porsche Boxster, while Jaguar dealers this week were saying they cannot get their hands on any more gorgeous new £50,000 XK8 coupes or convertibles until October.

One Porsche dealer says: "We were taking orders two years ago even before people saw the car. There is nothing we can do because there just aren't enough cars to satisfy the demand."

Even sub-£20,000 vehicles are in short supply. Fiat Coupé, the MGF and the Alfa GTV are missing from show-

rooms, presumed snapped up by enthusiasts. And the most-praised car of the year, the innovative Lotus Elise, is scarcer than a turkey at the January sales. The company is only able to make around 1,200 a year at the moment — and they have already been sold, so executives are warning that customers will have to wait 18 months before they see first sight of that futuristic aluminium chassis.

But if you really are desperate for that last-minute Christmas gift, you could cheat, bypass Santa and try Tom Hartley instead. Even though he has no elves to help him,

Tom has sold eight SLKs — four for Christmas presents — in the last month at the same time as many Mercedes dealers were lifting their nails waiting for the delivery of just one car. The premium for beating the four-year queue was £15,000 over list price, but when the coupboards are this bare, some buyers simply will not wait.

Tom will have Boxsters in stock before some Porsche dealers, probably at a £5,000 premium over the £19,950 list price, depending on demand, while the first Bentley Continental T — the fastest and probably the most desirable

Bentley yet — will land in his showroom in Overseal, Derbyshire, ready for January 1 delivery. Price: £228,000, which is £8,000 over list, but this is the most exotic of the exotic, a model so rare that buyers will scratch your eyes out to get one.

Not Tom, because he has 15 years' experience in buying and selling the cars that nobody else can find. When the waiting lists build, the desperate turn to Tom, whose contacts range across the country making him motoring's Mr Fix-it. If it exists,

he can find it. "People know they can trust me," he says. "I aim to get any car to a customer within a week of the order. If I can't get it, I say straight away. But the deal is always fair and I will be flexible as much as I can be."

"The SLK has been very, very popular and there will be a few ladies waking up on Christmas morning to a nice new sports car. But ordering was so far ahead, lots of people will be disappointed."

If your Christmas gift list has been reduced to a straight choice between socks, a scarf and talcum powder or writing out a cheque which would pay

for a four-bedroom detached, then Santa might still be able to come to your aid.

There are some exclusive cars still available, not bargains exactly and not likely to have their sticker prices slashed in the January sales even if you decide to wait.

What about the last of ten James Young Bentleys which is on sale at H. R. Owen in London, for example? Bad news: it is £190,000. Good news: based on a 150mph Turbo R, the James Young conversion has added a dramatic black pearlescent finish to an equally dramatic black and yellow interior (suitable

transport for a millionaire bee-keeper, perhaps, with built-in attaché case, umbrella and 40 other goodies to keep you occupied while you drive in the ultimate flying tank.

Or you could try something even more exotic such as the Maserati 300S on sale at the Paradise Garage in London. Stirling Moss said the six-cylinder, 3-litre "Mazzer", first raced in 1956, was the finest sports car he ever drove — and now you can find out what he was talking about. A snip at £500,000 or thereabouts. Oh, go on, Scrooge. Buy it: it's Christmas — and anyway, there's nothing else left.



Mercedes SLK: Up to four years.
BMW Z3: Earliest delivery 1998.
Porsche Boxster: Earliest 1998.
BMW 5-series: eight months.
Mercedes E-class: Eight months.

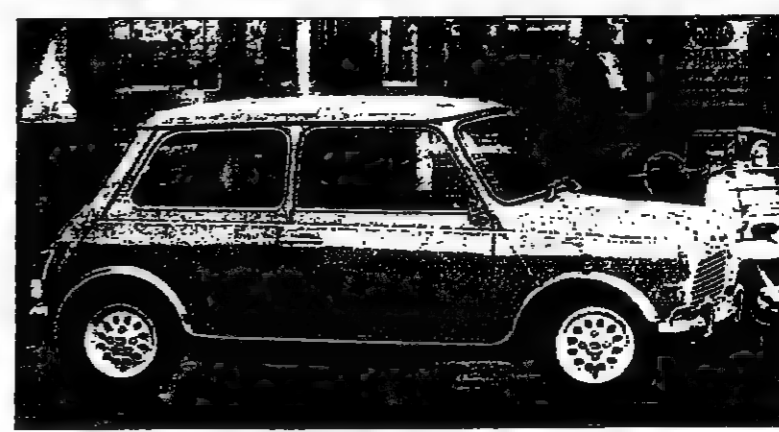
Jaguar XK8: up to eight months.
Lotus Elise: Eighteen months.
Alfa GTV: Five months.
Fiat Coupé: Four months.
MGF: Five months.

YOU CANNOT AFFORD FOR CHRISTMAS



Bentley Continental T: £228,000 ono. Fastest Bentley of all with amazing milled aluminium dashboard and loads of luxury.
Maserati 300S: £500,000 ono. Super cool at super price. The sports car Stirling Moss rates above all others.
James Young Bentley: £190,000 ono. Astonishing upgrade on a Turbo R with black and yellow upholstery and even more gadgets than the production version.

MOTORS YOU CAN HAVE IN YOUR STOCKING



Mini: £9,000 on the road. Best fun you can have with your clothes on this party season. Still lovable, even though middle-age spread has put up the price.
Italjet scooter: £2,500. As ridden by Michael Schumacher around the Formula One paddock. Available in Ferrari red and yellow at H. R. Owen.
Ford Ka: £7,350. Ka to make you go "Ahh". Cutesy-pie looks and roomy interior. And you could be first to get one, so place orders now.

STOCKING FULL OF CHRISTMAS

Available from: Deans, Currys, The Link, Dixons, John Lewis Partnership, Halfords, Pyramex, Tolidad, Maplin, House of Fraser selected Comet and Alders Stores, Watford Electronics, Motorworld, Charlie Browns, AJ Motor Stores, Welcome Break outlets and other leading high street electrical retailers.

Traffic

Helen Mound wonders if a blue badge and green wellies mix, while Roger Bell tests Ford's mighty 4x4



Explorer: after the unremarkable Maverick, what Ford executives have had to ask themselves is whether Britain really can take yet another competitor in the 4x4 market

Explorer finally finds Britain

It is the world's best-selling off-roader — but has taken six years to reach Britain. Ford has sold more than 2 million of its Explorer 4x4 vehicles in 60 countries since it was launched. America had the first vehicles in 1990, and Europe has had the Explorer in its showrooms for the past three years.

Now Britain gets the chance to sample the 4x4, which will be the biggest off-roader with the most powerful V6 4x4 engine on sale in this country, dwarfing even the Range Rover — although not in the price department.

Ford says Britain has had to wait because of the high cost of tailoring a US-built vehicle to a market with different requirements — and the steering wheel on the "wrong" side. Converting the Explorer to right-hand drive, developing the most powerful V6 engine in its class and designing the world's first five-speed automatic gearbox for an off-roader required lots of time and money.

Cynics prefer to believe the wait had more to do with Ford having its fingers burnt by its first venture into the 4x4 market in Europe with the unremarkable Maverick, a joint ven-

ture with Nissan. Nissan builds its own Terrano and the Maverick on the same production line, but neither has captured the imagination like Land Rover's Discovery.

Now Ford faces the prospect of 4x4 buyers who want a blue oval on the bonnet: upgrading from top-end Mavericks to the Explorer. Speed an extra £4,420 and 4x4 drivers can step up from the top 2.7-litre turbo-diesel Maverick with five doors to the £25,870 Explorer, which has just as much equipment — air-conditioning, twin front airbags and anti-lock brakes — as well as a more powerful engine, more space and a new five-speed automatic transmission.

Ford says the two off-roaders are aimed at different markets: the Maverick younger, the Explorer wealthier. To help define the differences, the Maverick has been relaunched with one trim level only so that Ford's 4x4 line-up ranges from the Maverick GLS (two engine options, 2.4 petrol or 2.7 diesel in three- or five-door versions) and the Explorer (4-litre V6 and five-door only).

Where the advertising campaign for the Maverick has been loud and lively and aimed at potentially young-

ger buyers who want off-road entertainment, Ford plans on being more methodical with the Explorer.

"Although Ford is a big off-road name in the United States, we need to strengthen our 4x4 credentials in Britain before we can go stampeding into the UK off-road market," explains Nav Sidhu at Ford.

The company will sell just 2,500 Explorers in 1997 to help develop a level of exclusivity and maintain reasonable resale values. To draw the contrast, Ford sells up to 5,000 Mavericks a year — but second-hand values can drop as much as £5,000 in just six months.

What Ford executives have had to ask themselves is whether Britain really can take yet another competitor in the market. Dealer forecasts are already jammed with nearly new off-roaders, and second-hand prices are showing evidence of oversupply.

Determined that the Explorer will not suffer a similar downfall, Ford has established a network of 160 dealers dedicated to selling what it hopes will become a fashionable niche model. Developed from new and existing dealerships the "sports coupé and off-road specialist dealers"

will sell the Ford Probe and Maverick alongside the new Explorer.

The Explorer faces tough competition — not least of all from its fierce US adversary, the Jeep Grand Cherokee. Until now, Jeep has had the monopoly on American 4x4 sales this side of the Atlantic but battle is about to commence in this country between the arch rivals.

Unlike the popular Grand Cherokee, the Explorer displays several less than endearing American characteristics: the chiming door-open warning signal that cannot be switched off, its fiddly key-operated fuel filler and its garish looks are let-downs. And its huge bulk might prove a problem for some drivers on our tight and twisty roads. Bigger than a Range Rover, bulkier than a Shogun, the Explorer is fearsome.

Forget bulk though: the sticker price is what matters and the Explorer's £25,870 makes the Jeep Grand Cherokee's £29,550 look steep, the Land Rover Discovery's £30,690 look crazy, the Mitsubishi Shogun's £37,590 outrageous and the Range Rover's £39,715 seem ludicrous.

But there are some drawbacks, one of which is the humdrum blue oval badge. No self-respecting member of the "green wellie" brigade would be seen driving a Ford off-roader, which explains Ford's worries about the company gaining the right credentials. In a market which profits from a high degree of mobility, Ford might have its work cut out to win customers.

Despite costing nearly £14,000 less than a Range Rover 4.0 V8 SE, the Ford Explorer improves on the "master of off-roaders" with electric front seats, automatic transmission, electric sunroof, a more spacious boot and is a whole second swifter in a 0-60mph sprint. Nevertheless, many Range Rover owners are unlikely to convert, even if the Explorer is the world's best selling 4x4.

The competition — and what they cost:
Land Rover Discovery (£19,765 to £30,690);
Vauxhall Frontera (£15,470 to £20,470);
Toyota RAV 4 (£14,399 to £17,261);
Mitsubishi Shogun (£19,900 to £37,590);
Range Rover (£35,130 to £47,765); Suzuki Vitara (£10,920 to £16,200); Jeep Cherokee (£17,550 to £24,850); Jeep Grand Cherokee (£29,550 to £30,550); Nissan Terrano (£17,600 to £23,000); Ford Maverick (£17,650 to £21,450).

ROAD TEST

Very heavy, but you get a lot of car for the price

Doing its rock-climbing party trick in a quarry somewhere in Scotland, the Ford Explorer had me grinning from ear to ear and my wife praying for terra firma. Nose-diving a precipice, it struck me that anyone with a penchant for big, butch off-roaders will love this larger-than-life American import.

My first reaction to the Explorer was that it felt cumbersome, agitated and slow. Its on-road performance is no better than that of a Ford Mondeo 1.8 costing over £10,000 less. Handling and agility is nothing like to good. But that's the way it is with heavyweight off-roaders. If you want a vehicle that scrambles irresistibly on the rough stuff, you cannot expect it to feel like an accomplished family saloon on smooth tarmac.

Off-roaders seem at last to have saturated the urban jungle. After a decade of spectacular growth, the 4x4 market here has peaked if this year's sales, slightly down on 1995's at around 88,000, are a guide. Even with the market in decline, though, Ford reckons it should have a larger slice of the action.

After the success of Chrysler's Jeep Cherokee, Ford was expected to promote the Explorer's "Made in the US" label. It won't. Instead, it will focus on a highly competitive price of around £25,000. For this, you get a whopping five-door, five-seater, a 4.0-litre V6 engine and five-speed automatic transmission. Standard equipment includes anti-lock brakes, two airbags, powered seats, air conditioning, cruise control, even a digital compass. There are no manual or diesel alternatives. What you see here is what's on offer at 160 specialist Ford dealers.

Slotting in above the Maverick (a junior sibling by a different marriage), the chrome-wheeled, balloon-tired Explorer — at 188.5ins, it's longer than a Range Rover — is a big, handsome vehicle

with lots of presence. You sit tall, all the better to see out, in seats that cosset as well as they embrace.

Legroom in the back is generous, luggage accommodation colossal. A double-acting handle releases either the rear window or the tailgate, unencumbered by a hanging spare wheel. As when loading, so when clambering in and out, it's all too easy to soil your clothes on muddy sills.

By off-roader standards, the Explorer puts on a lusty display of muscle. Its 206 brake horse power engine (made in Germany) giving lively acceleration. In over-drive top — which can be cancelled — the Explorer is exceptionally long-legged and quiet. Reasonably economical, too. The gearbox (made in France) shifts seamlessly, but the stiff selector, short on positions, discourages manual over-ride. Lower-tio drive is selected by a dash-mounted knob, eliminating the need for a second gear lever.

Big and heavy though it is, the two-ton Explorer does not feel awkwardly large on the road — except when parking. Even then, it's quite easy to manoeuvre. I liked the weighty feel of the all-disc brakes, but anyone used to a light touch may find them disconcertingly heavy. Tough but primitive suspension denies the Explorer a smooth ride, though you do get used to the choppy motion. If not exactly agile, the car feels secure and sure-footed when hustled through wet corners. On clean Scottish tarmac, the big tyres gripped with a tenacity I suspect they would lack on emulsified surfaces further south.

If the Explorer can impress an off-roader sceptic like me, Ford will have no trouble selling its quota of 2,500. I can see prices of the opposition — Cherokee, Monterey, Discovery, Range Rover, Shogun — being cut just to compete.

While not exactly agile, it still feels secure

EXPLORER

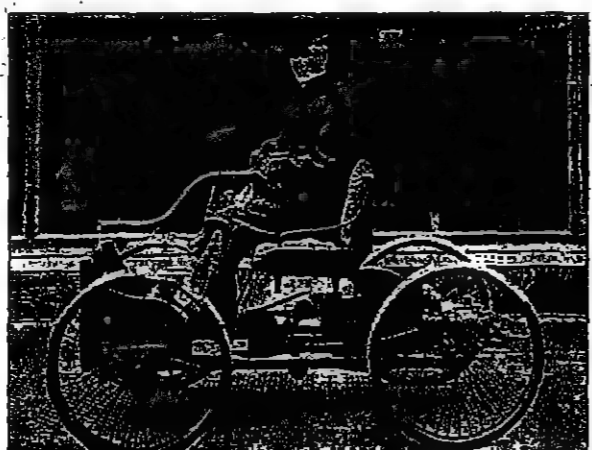
Engine: Four-litre V6 delivering about 206bhp through a five-speed automatic transmission with four-wheel drive.
Performance: 0-60mph in 10.9 seconds, top speed 106mph; fuel consumption, urban cycle 15.5mpg, extra urban 25.4mpg, combined 20.6mpg.
Size: Length 4,789mm; height 1,730mm; width 1,950mm.
Equipment: Anti-lock brakes, twin airbags.
Price: £25,870.

Turkey with added petrol

IT WAS Christmas Eve, and in the kitchen a young wife was preparing to stuff the turkey when her husband appeared in the doorway — and not bearing gifts, writes Ian Martin.

Staggering slightly under the weight of a small engine and balancing a can of petrol, he said he wanted to clamp the engine to the side of the sink — and could she hold the can and allow petrol to drip into the carburettor while he cranked the engine?

Unhesitatingly, she scooped up the turkey and stuffing ingredients, then did as he asked. Finally the engine spluttered into life. It ran for 55 seconds — her husband timed it, and noted it exactly. He pronounced himself highly satisfied, uncoupled the engine and carried it triumphantly off to his workshop in the shed behind the house, leaving his wife in a haze of exhaust to scrub the sink area clean of oil and petrol traces before getting on with the Christmas dinner. An understanding lady willing and able to share her man's enthusiasms, or a sadly downtrodden and fearful woman bullied by a preoccupied and arrogant husband? Surely the former, for this was the Christmas of 1891.



Driven man: Henry Ford on his first quadricycle

the scene was the kitchen of a rented house in Bagley Avenue, Detroit, the wife was the recently married Clara Bryant Ford and her husband, the 28-year-old Henry, one of many hopefuls working round the clock in the city of automotive dreams to grab their share of the rewards as the era of mechanical mobility took shape around them.

The story of the Christmas Eve kitchen sink engine test has been related proudly by the couple's great-granddaughters, Anna and Charlotte Ford. They never saw Clara — as anything other than a patient and devoted wife whose unquestioned duty was to stand by her man in the best traditions of the American pioneers.

In fact Clara's willing forbearance would prove to be nothing less than a keystone in the foundations of today's feminist freedoms, according to Anna and Charlotte. "By placing herself second she would enable those

of us coming after to be first," they said in a book about the Ford family. "The automobile has had an enormous effect on our society. Especially it has helped to liberate the modern woman. It did for women socially what the franchise did for women politically. The motor car gave us freedom and independence."

HENRY certainly did not regard his wife as downtrodden. Indeed his nickname for her was The Believer, because she had faith in him and encouraged him when everyone else was deriding his efforts.

On a number of occasions he publicly acknowledged the debt he owed to her unsparing support, and they must have respected each other because they lived together for 49 years.

The world of motoring probably owes more than might be imagined to young Clara Bryant Ford and her wifely patience on Christmas Eve.

The ultimate happy family man

When you sit around the table over the holidays determined to amuse a squad of increasingly fractious children, you should think of the Jacques family, writes David Long.

For they invented the board games which have become a staple ingredient in the diet of Christmas entertainment. Christopher Jacques' family has passed the baton for six generations, so it is only fitting that John Jacques and Son is the company which invented Happy Families.

More than 200 years in the business (during which time they also created Snakes and Ladders, Tiddly-winks and Ludo) more than justifies the Jacques' claim to be the world's oldest games makers. Today the company is equally well known for its sports equipment, which includes the table-tennis tables (a Jacques introduced Ping-Pong to Britain in 1900) and championship-level croquet sets.

In fact it was another Jacques, John II who in 1851 at the Great Exhibition first brought croquet to England. Like the rest of the family, his great-grandson Christopher is himself no mean mallet, but it is cars that arouse his passion, especially for the older Jaguars.

How did you first learn to drive?

On quiet country roads in Cornwall during our annual family holiday when I was 15 and then later, during the 1956 Suez Crisis, driving unaccompanied which learners were still permitted to do.



What was your first car?

An Austin Seven Special which I bought after selling my father's Austin Ten for £90. A local garage had offered him £50 for it and he told me I could keep anything I made in excess of that.

What car do you drive now, and why?

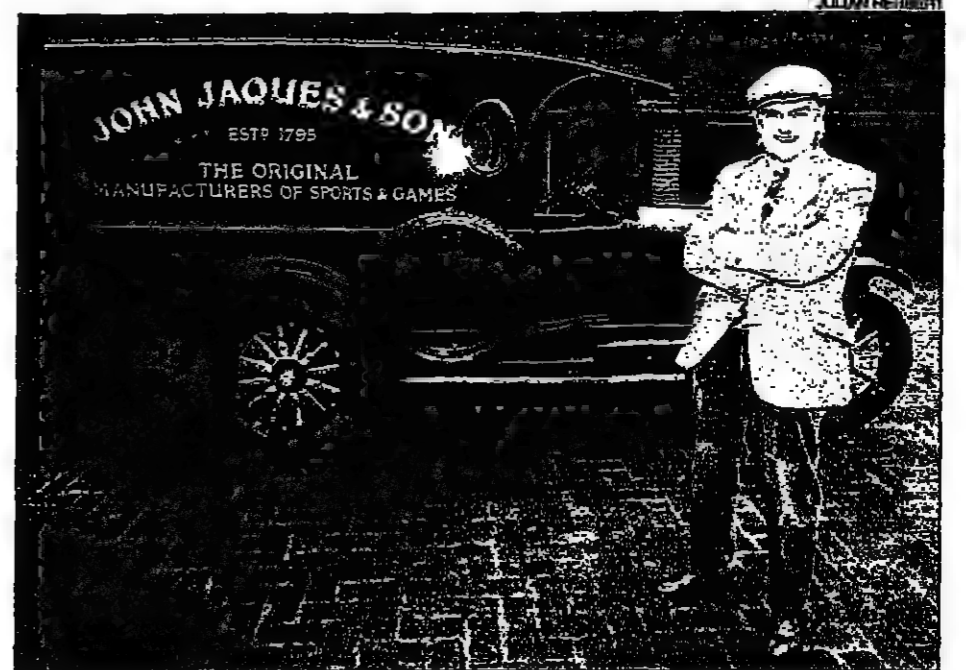
A Jaguar XJ6 Series III which I love for its classic line and timeless shape as well as for that combination of effortless travel and silent progress. I am at a loss as to why anyone would choose a BMW or Mercedes-Benz over the home-grown product. I also have three classic Jaguars which share the same splendid XK engine — two XK120s, one of which is a special lightweight model, and an XK140 — and a 1926 Dodge 15cwt box van similar to the ones our company used between the wars.

What is your most hated car?

I would never buy a Ford. When I was young, they were cheap and not built to last and this memory has remained with me, even though things may have changed recently.

What is your dream car?

A D-type Jaguar. The sight of these cars being raced by Mike Hawthorn, Tony Brooks and Stirling Moss is etched on my mind. They looked like aircraft on wheels.



Christopher Jacques and one of the company vans — rather slower than his Jaguars

What is your worst habit in the car?

Rudely pushing out of junctions into a stream of traffic which will not let me in.

What infuriates you most about other drivers?

Centre-lane cruisers on the motorway and crawlers around the country roads of Sussex where I live.

What is the most unusual thing you have done in your car?

Driving my lightweight XK120 at 125mph down the Mulsanne

Straight to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Jaguar's 1951 Le Mans win, and last month I took a 1903 Panhard underneath Constitution Arch at Hyde Park Corner. The route through is usually closed to traffic.

Have you ever had points on your licence?

Who hasn't! Yes, all for speeding through traps and so on.

What do you listen to in your car?

Mostly Radio 4, occasionally John Dunn on Radio 2 and also Radio 5 for sport.

If you were the Secretary of State for Transport, what is the first thing you would do?

Make local authorities ban petrol and diesel vehicles from town centres during certain times, introduce compulsory schemes for out-of-town parking and take steps to improve public transport.

What is your favourite car advertisement?

The ones for the Renault Clio, although I do not spend much time watching television and suspect that were I to do so repetition would render even these unwatchable.

A British restoration classic

Behind the wheel of an impeccably rebuilt 1974 MGB, Eve-Ann Prentice found that the years rolled away and a lost age when driving a car was fun returned



BORN to be wild (well, wildish), the MGB GTV8 heads out on the highway looking for adventure. In

pristine British Racing Green with chrome which manages to glint even in the fog-threatening gloom of mid-December Cotswolds, the 1974 MG was raring to go on one of its first outings since being totally rebuilt.

Pulling away from the Oxfordshire offices of British Motor Heritage, which stripped back the years and made the car new once more during two days at the National Classic Motor Show in Birmingham last month, the gussy engine growled like Eartha Kitt.

This weekend the energetic born-again 22-year-old belongs to someone who paid just £1 for the privilege, after the car was raffied for charity by Heritage and Motorcare Services. Last week she was mine, all mine, for a few too-fleeting miles and one deeply embarrassing hiccup for both of us.

Snuggling into the seat, and re-learning the venerable technology which makes you remember to flip the indicators off as well as on, I was peering round the steering-wheel to check that the headlamp light was on to announce our presence in the crepuscular half-light as we slowed to approach a roundabout.

Nothing coming from the right, so a shift to second ready to pull away — and I have stalled, cutting off that lovely throaty engine in its prime. Then horror. Whiffs of blue-black smoke curl from beneath the bonnet and an ominously acrid smell seeps into the car.



DAVID James, leader of the team which carried out the rebuild, did his best to look nonchalant and not scramble too

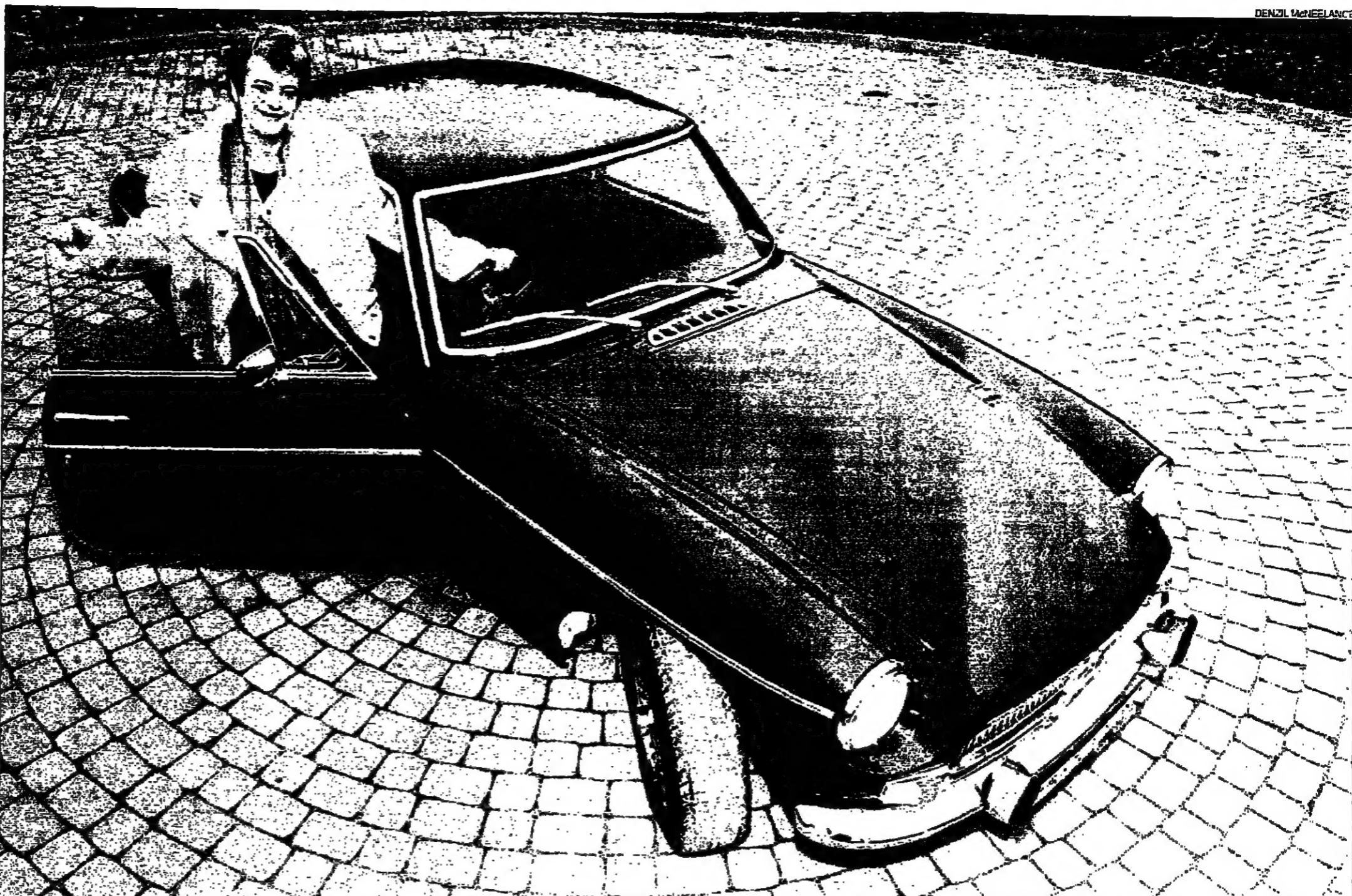
quickly from the passenger seat as he released the bonnet catch. Dialling mission control from his mobile phone while simultaneously scouring the glistening engine compartment, a look of barely-disguised relief flooded his face and he aborted the call back to HQ.

A rogue wire had fallen on to the hot exhaust and melted, probably jolted out of place by the ignominious stall, I silently conjectured.

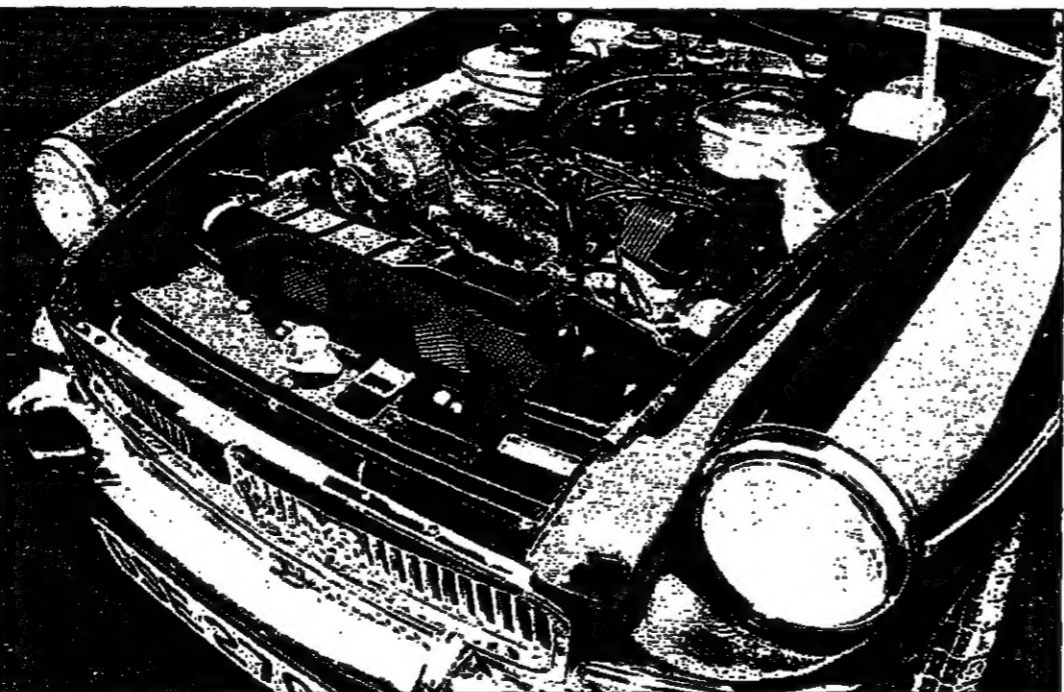
From then on, the prospective drama turned out to be merely a momentary hitch. Driving the MGB GTV8 is like being given the elixir of youth, the years roll away, and the fun of driving returns; none of this automatic gear-changing, electronically-controlled ease of today which robs you of the sense of really riding all those horse-power. The MGB's steering is exuberantly responsive, while the road-holding is reassuring. The whole package is like driving a sophisticated grown-up's go-kart.

The MGB GTV8 was the most powerful of the production MGBs and just 2,591 were built between April 1973 and June 1976, all of them for the British market. The one raffied on Monday was made in 1974 and is believed to have had just one owner. For the past six years she has slumbered in a garage, like Sleeping Beauty waiting for British Motor Heritage to act the Prince.

British Motor Heritage, owned by Rover, makes essential parts to keep classic cars on the road, including new bodysheets such as that used to rebuild the MGB



Prentice and the MGB GTV8 that lay like Sleeping Beauty for six years before the Prince arrived in the shape of British Motor Heritage. "The whole package is like driving a sophisticated grown-up's go-kart"



"That lovely throaty engine growled like Eartha Kitt — until I stalled and cut it off in its prime"

MGB GTV8

Engine: 3.5-litre V8 engine fuelled by twin SU carburetors to give 137bhp at 5,000rpm. Four-speed manual gearbox with overdrive.

Performance: 0-60mph in 8.6 seconds, 0-100mph in 25.3 seconds. Top speed 124mph. Average fuel consumption 23.5mpg.

Price: £1,925 at launch in 1973 and £3,317 when discontinued in 1975. The pristine model, complete with indicators which must flipped off as well as on, totally rebuilt by British Motor Heritage, is valued at between £15,000 and £30,000.

GTV8 at the Birmingham show. James. "It took from 10.30 on the Saturday until 3.30 on the Sunday." British Motor Heritage made a powerful impact at Le Mans, paving the way for the great era of British two-seater sports cars with the birth in the Sixties of the MG Midget and the MGB. Things started to go wrong in the mid-

constant crowd watching," says James. "It took from 10.30 on the Saturday until 3.30 on the Sunday." British Motor Heritage made a powerful impact at Le Mans, paving the way for the great era of British two-seater sports cars with the birth in the Sixties of the MG Midget and the MGB. Things started to go wrong in the mid-

of Engine Machine Services at Worktop and the rear axle was reconstructed by Moss Europe in London, for instance.

Brian Cameron, Managing Director of British Motor Heritage at Witney in Oxfordshire, says he tries to "incubate that we are not in the car industry, but in the leisure industry". Owning a classic car should be an enjoyable experience, he says. "It could be a boat or ponies for the children, instead we want people to see driving classic cars as a leisure activity."

British Motor Heritage is the commercial arm of the British Motor Industry Heritage Trust which also runs the Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon, Warwickshire, Britain's largest purpose-designed motor museum. The museum houses more than 200 vehicles as well as more than four million engineering drawings.

Vaughan Freeman meets the owner of an unstoppable MGB GT

Even more miles to go

CLASSICS don't always need co-sinners: Richard Monk has covered at least 230,000 miles since he

bought his beloved MGB GT second-hand two decades ago, proof, if any were needed, that the place for cars with heart is not the dusty death of a motor museum, but out on the open road.

Richard drives his 1974 V8 engine MGB GT sports car every day as his commuter car, has holidayed with it in France, Germany and Spain, and also driven all over Britain in it for his job as assistant club secretary for the MG Owners' Club.

When he bought the car in 1975, it was 18 months old and had already covered 17,000 miles. Now it has "gone round the clock" twice and shows no signs of slowing down. What is more, he says of the 45,000 MG Owners' Club members he estimates around 30,000 use their cars, as he does, day in, day out.

The car has had a couple of breakdowns, but nothing that could not be fixed at the roadside. And costs are nothing like as prohibitive as might be thought. Fully comprehensive insurance cover, with maximum no-claims bonus, is £230 a year, and because the MG has always been such a popular car, parts are plentiful and reasonably priced.

There is also the advantage that such cars, if used as company cars, offer huge tax incentives since their personal tax in kind liability is based on their original purchase price. Additionally, depreciation on an MG is minimal. Most cars that are bought new lose a third of their value in the first year, at the rate of around £100 a week for an average family saloon. Prices for used MGs remain constant, and indeed the first examples of the latest Rover MGF which went on sale recently actually sold for more than when they first left the showroom.

Richard says: "My car is not in concours condition, but it is very presentable, and has done approximately 230,000 miles. It has proved very reliable. It has had the odd breakdown, which you would expect given the sorts of



Monk and his MGB GT: "Reliability was always pretty good"

mileages it has covered, but nothing irrecoverable. With a car such as this, if you break down at the side of the road you are far more likely to be able to fix it, because the design is so simple. With a modern car, you open the bonnet, and there is a whole load of electronics and computers staring back at you, and there is nothing you can do except shut the bonnet again."

DEPENDENT on the time he has to spare, Richard works on the car himself, but the huge numbers of garages specialising in MGs mean that getting it serviced professionally is easy and relatively inexpensive, even if services, around every 3,000 or 4,000 miles, are more frequent than on more modern vehicles.

Richard concedes that some classic cars can pose problems for the unwary buyer: "It's true that in some instances classic cars are held together with string and chewing gum." The trick he says is in buying a car which was, when new, a strong design, and has been cared for since.

"With the MG, the reliability factor was always pretty good. A fair percentage of Club members

do their own work, and are fairly competent at it, but on top of that there is a fairly good network of parts outlets and repair shops.

"The MG is a particularly strong car, with a monocoque construction and strong chassis rails running the length of it, so that even if it doesn't have modern equipment like an airbag, I certainly feel safe driving one."

Are such cars, though, built when working heaters were for wimps and cabins boasted all the draught-proofing of a wind-blasted barn, suitable for today's pampered drivers? Richard believes they are, and is not averse to a bit of pampering himself. He has had electric windows fitted to his MGB, and says: "We have got involved in developing all sorts of products to enhance the car's handling and suspension, as well as its comfort."

Enduring spirit of the Twenties

MGs swung with the Sixties and remain sports cars of ultimate style

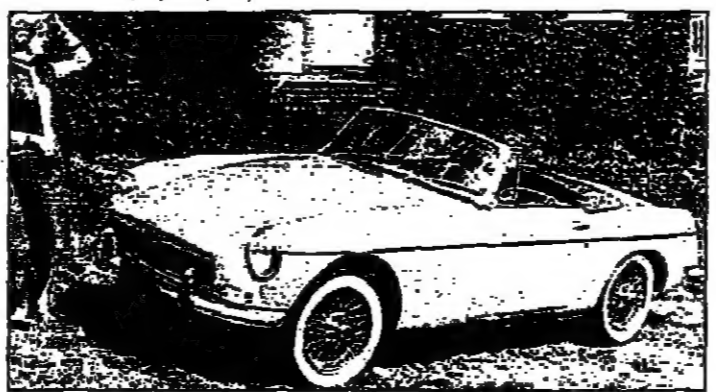
ANGELA Rippon, Sting and Viscount Linley have had one love in common — the MGB. They all owned models of the quintessential British two-seater sports car which mirrored the new egalitarianism of the 1960s, writes Eve-Ann Prentice.

Everyone wanted one. Introduced at the 1962 motor show, it was the heir to 40 years of motoring success emanating from Morris Garages. Yet just 18 years of life were left to the MG company.

The MG was the brainchild of Cecil Kimber — new general manager of the erstwhile staid Morris Garages — who captured the flap-

peresque spirit of the Twenties by converting a four-cylinder Morris Cowley into a two-seater and having it painted in pastel shades.

In 1924, a converted Bullnose Morris was given the designation MG for the first time. The sports cars proved so profitable that MG moved, into a new factory at Abingdon in 1928, making way for the flood of models to come.



An MGB from the early Sixties, when everybody wanted to own one

In 1932, the J2 Midget cost 50p less than £200, while the first of the T-series in 1936 set a readily identifiable MG style and cost just £222. After the war, the 1955 MGA made a powerful impact at Le Mans, paving the way for the great era of British two-seater sports cars with the birth in the Sixties of the MG Midget and the MGB. Things started to go wrong in the mid-

1970s when British Leyland had no new engine to meet growing American anti-pollution laws and dollar-strengthening fluctuations made the cars ludicrously expensive in the US.

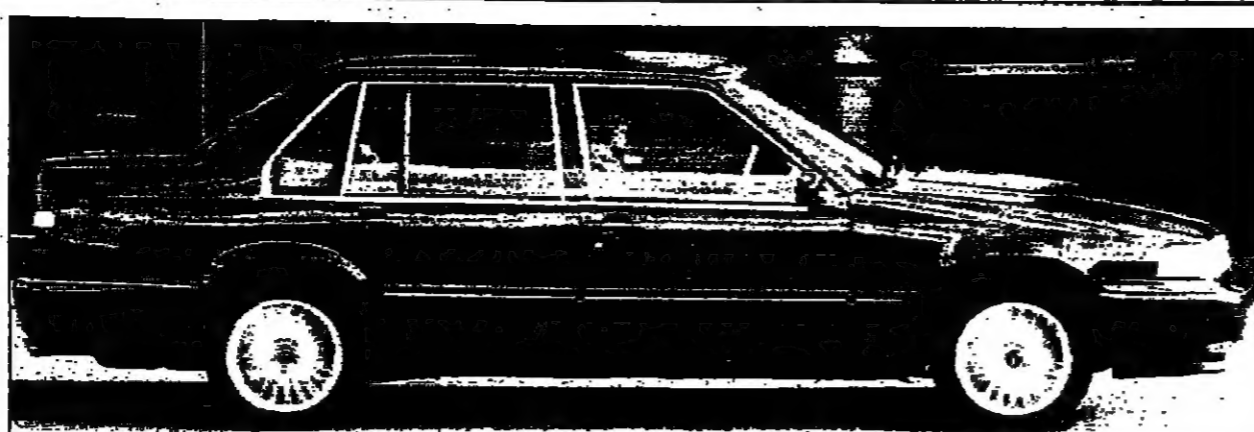
British Leyland, under Sir Michael Edwardes, pulled the plug on MG — but up to 100,000 MGs were thought to be on Britain's roads when Rover launched the MGF in 1992.

CARMART: YOUR GUIDE TO WHAT'S NEW, AND WHAT'S USED, ON THE FORECOURTS

CAR TOOLS



Halldine



Volvo 960: the only criticism is that the driver has precious little to do apart from point it in the right direction

Safely in the lap of luxury

THINK of a Volvo and what springs to mind? Not long ago the immediate image was of a big, heavy car bristling with safety features and probably being driven at a speed guaranteed to ensure that none of them would ever be needed, writes Alan Capps.

But the company has revamped its image more radically than most. The middle-aged tank has been replaced and a dash of sporting style has been mixed with that reputation for robustness, practicality and legendary safety. Unashamed luxury, however, is not likely to figure very high on the list of most Volvo

ROADTEST

drivers. But the updated 960 range shows that when the Swedish manufacturer turns its mind to making you cosy and comfortable as well as safe it does so with the same efficiency.

The 960 is one of those models which bears the heavy burden of being known as a "flagship" — somehow expected to incorporate all the virtues of a marque and then offer something extra. What it offers, in anything but its most basic form, is an interior reeking of leather and walnut,

VOLVO 960 CD
Engine: 24-valve, three-litre, six-cylinder producing 204bhp at 6,000rpm.
Transmission: Four-speed automatic with settings for sport, for maximum performance, economy, for fuel efficiency, and winter, to minimise wheelslip.
Performance: Max speed 130mph; 0-62 mph in 9.1 seconds.
Price: £28,365.

seats you sink into and almost everything you can think of operated electrically — climate control, driver's seat adjustment, sunroof, windows and mirrors. All models have anti-lock brakes, driver's airbag, side airbags and five three-point seatbelts.

Volvo has gone to a lot of

trouble transferring the technology which has lived up to its 850 range so successfully to the heavier 900-series. Aluminium and light alloys have been used extensively and the result is a stiffer and more responsive chassis without the roll so often associated with limousine-size cars.

The three-litre six-cylinder engine pulls the whole package along smoothly and surprisingly quickly, getting from 0-62mph in 9.2 seconds. While the automatic transmission with sport, economy and winter modes is one of the most versatile on the market. It is a perfectly packaged up-market saloon and it more or less drives itself.

That is possibly the one criticism that can be offered of this "flagship". After all the effort that Volvo has put into its new image as a "driver's car", the 960 leaves a driver precious little to do apart from point it in the right direction.

FORECOURT

PLEASING looks, perky performance and design ahead of its time, the Nissan Micra (93K to 96N) is a big hit with used car buyers, reports CAP Black Book. Matched to its eminently useful mini-size, is the Nissan's well-founded reputation for quality and refinement. Also cheap to run and maintain, Micra represents excellent second-hand value. Buy of the week is the average mileage 1.0L, three-door Micra, likely to be priced at around £5,000. The automatic version is highly regarded and always in short supply, a situation which usually sees the autos demanding, and getting, a £500 premium over equivalent manuals.

The Micra topped its rivals by heading the supermini category of the 1996 Top Gear/JD Power survey of owner satisfaction and reliability. Best to avoid the 1.3-litre SLX since lower specified models represent better value.

AT THE other end of the scale, the Mitsubishi Space Wagon stakes a claim as a cheap, seven-seater heavy-weight. The Space Wagon shares the toughness of its Mitsubishi Shogun off-roading cousin but suffers from lack of reputation. Well built, accommodating, and slow depreciating, best buy is any diesel model, or the 1.8-litre GLX petrol, with a typical example being a 1995M with average miles, costing £12,995.

USED CAR BRIEF



LAND ROVER
When Land Rover launched its first vehicle in 1948, doors were an optional extra. The Series III, launched in 1972 and discontinued in 1984, carried on that same no-fills tradition. Hugely strong, this is the car that features on most television documentaries where daredevil wildfliers motor into unknown lands. The Range Rover and Discovery are elite and expensive vehicles by comparison. Cuboid, boxy and uncomfortable, the Series III cannot get over it, it will go through it.

GOOD NEWS
More than half a million Series III models were produced so there are plenty to choose from. Available in short (90-inch) and long (110-inch) wheelbase for versatility and as a pick-up, seven and 12-seat station wagon (though passengers need to be hardy), with 2.3, 2.8 and 3.5-litre V6 petrol, plus 2.5-litre diesel engines.

LOOK FOR
Country versions from 1982 have improved comfort, trim, reclining front seats and soundproofing. Cars with power steering and the post-78 car with 3.5-litre V6 engine also make good buys. Check it has been regularly repainted and cleaned to hold off chassis rot. An old good 'un fetches more than a poor young 'un. Condition is more important than age and mileage.

SAFETY RATING
Bumpers like building girders tend to make mince-meat of the softly curved bodywork and fancy plastic mouldings most cars carry. The in-built strength and four-wheel-drive grip makes the car inherently safe, though inside there are lots of worrying sharp edges and no airbag.

REPLACEMENT PARTS
(prices include VAT): clutch assembly £255; full exhaust £265; front shock absorber £45; front brakepads (pair) £20; alternator £50 (exchange); starter motor £185 (exchange); tyre £25-255.

OVERALL
Despite its age, the styling of Land Rovers never dates so the Series III has massive street cred. It is tough and durable but its main attraction lies in the fact that this is a car that is superbly equipped and capable of doing the job for which it was designed: going off-road. A classic, and it has the spare wheel on the bonnet.

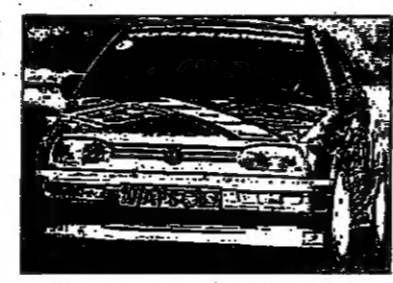
BAD NEWS
Compared to modern cars, the Series III comes from another world of prohibitively unrefined motoring. Motorway journeys are hideously noisy and slow, the ride is chatteringly firm. A slot for a radio was the car's concession to creature comforts.

AVOID
Models with rust in the engine bulkhead, and along the door tops. Sills can also be prone to rot and check rear cross-member especially carefully. Check for excessive play in the steering and for worn tyres, which are costly. Gearbox whine is normal but particularly noisy transmissions can mean bills ahead.

INSURANCE
Cover from AA Insurance (0800 444777) on a V8 1979 Series III costs a 55-year-old professional, male or female, living in Winchester with full no claims bonus, £29 a year fully comprehensive. A 22-year-old in excellent condition, £2,500 for a roadworthy model in need of some cosmetic and mechanical attention, and £300 for a car that is running but which needs extensive work.

PRICES
Expect to pay around £4,500 for a Series III in excellent condition, £2,500 for a roadworthy model in need of some cosmetic and mechanical attention, and £300 for a car that is running but which needs extensive work.

STAND well back on the school run because that tame-looking diesel-powered "rattle and roller" could be a monster. Volkswagen this week unveiled a Golf racer (right), astonishingly, powered by diesel. Using the same kind of power pack which mums and dads use everyday in their hatchbacks, this racing version pulls 170 brake horse power.



famed VR6 petrol engine. Fuel economy is said to be better than the standard production 110bhp engine, which powers the current Passat and will appear soon in the Sharan people carrier.

TOO heavy for the top of the Christmas tree but one of the best presents of all this year goes to Elaine Pritchard, who lives in Edinburgh and has won our Volvo Cannondale V3000 mountain bike. We asked which model would star with Val Kilmer in the movie version of *The Saint*, and Elaine correctly answered the C70 coupe. Roger Moore was the original television Saint, while Tom Walkinshaw's TWR Racing is the company which races Volvos in the British Touring Car Championship series. The Cannondale

is also a winner and worth £3,500, which makes it a gift-wrapped, two-wheeler to dream about.

AND lots of good news for two-wheelers: motorcycle injury accidents have dropped 61 per cent since 1981 — a bigger cut than for any other form of transport. However, other vehicles were found to be the cause of the accident in seven out of ten cases in which a two-wheeler was involved. Fatal motorcycle accidents are down 56 per cent, while serious injuries are down 67 per cent. Apparently, eight out of ten motorcyclists also own a car, raising the awareness of the needs of two-wheeled road users.

AN EXCLUSIVE COMPETITION

THE TIMES

Win a £17,200 Toyota Picnic FFV

The Times offers you the chance to win every family's dream car — the new Toyota Picnic Family Fun Vehicle which will be going on sale in the UK for the first time in January. The six-seater vehicle has been designed with the aim of making travelling with children a happy and comfortable experience for everyone in the car.

While working on the new car's development, Toyota commissioned a report by a leading

psychologist, to investigate the psychology of family travel. The report identified that although it may not seem impossible to change children's behaviour on long car journeys, there are certain fundamentals that ensure more peaceful family travel.

The Toyota Picnic Family Fun Vehicle has a list of impressive features including six individual seats, all with 3-point seat belts, giving children their own space to minimise the risk of irritation. Safety features include dual air bags and side impact beams. There are a total of 17 different seat combinations and a power outlet in the rear — essential for the kids' personal stereo on that long car journey. For your chance to win this superb vehicle, collect four tokens from The Times and complete the entry form below.



HOW TO ENTER

For your chance to win the Toyota Picnic collect four differently numbered tokens from the seven which have appeared in The Times since Saturday December 14. Token seven appears tonight. Send them with the completed entry form to: The Times Toyota

Picnic Competition, Ashertree Court, London EC8B 8NG. The closing date is first post Friday January 17, 1997. If you missed any tokens, you can get up to two by sending a SAE, before January 6, to: The Times Toyota Token Request, PO Box 496, London E1 9DW.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: 1. Entries for the Toyota Picnic competition must be received by the closing date. 2. The car will be presented to the winner in good condition and will be the responsibility of the winner. 3. The winner may be required to be photographed for publicity purposes. 4. Acceptance of the car is subject to the winner's agreement to the terms and conditions of the competition. 5. The winner will be the person who correctly completes the competition entry form and sends it to the correct address. 6. The winner will be notified by post. 7. The winner will be responsible for the car until it is returned to the competition organisers. 8. The competition is open to residents of the United Kingdom. 9. The competition is open to residents of the United Kingdom. 10. The competition is open to residents of the United Kingdom.

THE TIMES/TOYOTA COMPETITION ENTRY FORM

Attach four differently numbered Toyota Picnic tokens from The Times, answer the question below and complete the tie-break.

What are the four missing words in this slogan?
Is a Toyota

Post this form to: The Times/Toyota Competition, Ashertree Court, London EC8B 8NG. The competition closes on January 17, 1997.

Mr/Ms/Mrs/Ms First name

Address

Postcode Day Tel (or STD code)

It would help us if you answered these four questions:

Which one of the following age groups do you fall into? (Please tick box)

☐ 1) 15-24 ☐ 2) 25-34 ☐ 3) 35-44 ☐ 4) 45-54 ☐ 5) 55-64 ☐ 6) 65+

Tie-break: please state in no more than 12 words why you would like to win the Toyota Picnic

Which national daily newspaper(s) do you buy regularly (4-6 copies) during the week?

Which national daily newspaper(s) do you buy occasionally (3 copies or less) during the week?

Which national Sunday newspaper(s) do you buy regularly (2-4 copies a month)?

If you would prefer not to receive information and offers from organisations carefully selected by The Times, please tick ☐

THE TIMES
TOYOTA
picnic
TOKEN 7

HelpAd

BRANDOPOLY

HelpAd is a new advertising medium which enables one company to advertise its product on the packaging of another. For example, Hovis Bread allows HelpAd the right to sell space on its packaging to another brand, i.e. Anchor Spreadable Butter. The advertisement is printed inside a HelpAd Identifier and proceeds are used to finance Red Cross work at home and abroad.

Start collecting these HelpAd products at a store near you.

Don't let people's lives depend on chance, play the game, you know it's the right thing to do.

Support those who support us.

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DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY COOPERS & LYBRAND

These participating companies are committed to supporting the Red Cross with HelpAd over the next 12 months.

We should like to thank them for their courage in using this new advertising medium and of course consumers for buying HelpAd products.

May we take this opportunity to wish everyone a peaceful Holiday and a happy and prosperous New Year.



For further information please contact
HelpAd on 0171-494 1141

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